CHAPTER III

THE ALLIED COUNTER OFFENSIVE AND GENERAL EMPLOYMENT OF NAVAL FORCES

22. Plans and policy [PLAN 1

While all this had been going on in Norwegian waters, plans to counter the German invasion were being concerted as rapidly as possible by the Allied Governments. 'Completely outwitted'[1] and forestalled as they were, their plans were necessarily improvisations; events proved that they were undertaken on a totally inadequate scale. The troops and ships earmarked for the discarded plan R.4 were at any rate available, but since the organisation and equipment of the troops had been designed for unopposed landings and the Germans were already in possession of the principal ports, new landing places had to be chosen; as already mentioned, the first convoy sailed from the Clyde two days after the German landings, with the Narvik area as its destination.

The first hint of the new plans to reach the Commander-in-Chief, Home Fleet, was contained in A.T. 0820 of 9th April[2] already referred to, which told him to prepare attacks on the German ships of war in Bergen and Trondheim and said 'we shall probably want to land a force' at Narvik. Some sixteen hours later, A.T. 0057/10 went a stage further:—

> 'The policy of the Allies is to give Norway as much assistance as possible. To do this it will be necessary to take Bergen and Trondheim. Narvik will also be taken. The order in which these operations will be undertaken has not been settled, but in the meantime it is important that no reinforcements of any kind should reach these three places.'

This signal crossed the signal 2231/9 which it will be remembered the Commander-in-Chief had sent giving his general ideas after the German air attack on his fleet that afternoon, in which he recommended attacking the enemy in the north with surface forces and military assistance, 'leaving the southern area mostly to submarines, due to German air superiority in the south'. With this view the Admiralty concurred in A.T. 1904/10:—

> 'As enemy is now established at Narvik, recapture of that place takes priority over operations against Bergen and Trondheim. Expedition is being prepared as quickly as possible, and you will be further informed when plan and time-table are completed. In the meantime it is of primary importance to prevent Narvik's being reinforced by sea. Possibility of seizing and holding a temporary base near Narvik with small military force is under urgent examination: in the meantime you will presumably arrange for a temporary refuelling anchorage in the north . . . .
>
> Admiralty consider that interference with communications in southern areas must be left mainly to submarines, air and mining, aided by intermittent sweeps when forces allow.'

As things turned out, no operations (other than air attack) were attempted against Bergen; and the Allied plan finally adopted was confined to landings in two areas—the Vest Fjord area in the north with Narvik as its objective and the Trondheim area some 300 miles further south. This necessarily entailed dispersion of force; indeed at first there seems to have been considerable

[1] Churchill, THE SECOND WORLD WAR, Vol. I, p. 474.

[2] *See* Sec. 12 *ante*.

indecision as to which area should constitute the main effort. The enemy, however, had no such doubts as to their main strategic object (*see* Sec. 21 *ante*) and concentrated all their efforts on securing Trondheim, with the result that the Allied forces landed in this area, which never attained a strength of above about 12,000 men, were forced speedily to withdraw.

The Narvik expedition eventually reached a strength of nearly 30,000, counting outlying detachments in the Bodo area—about 100 miles to the southward of Narvik—which, after the withdrawal from the Trondheim area, the Allies attempted to hold, in order to deny the Germans possible sites for airfields for operations against the Narvik expedition. This expedition was known as Rupert ; its first units arrived at Harstad in the Lofoten Islands on 14th and 15th April, but it suffered various delays owing to weather and other causes and it was not until 28th May that the actual assault on Narvik took place. By that time Germany had overrun the Netherlands, which led to the decision to withdraw the British and French troops from Norway altogether.

In the central area landings were planned at Namsos, about 150 miles north of Trondheim by rail, and at Aandalsnes about the same distance to the south. It was hoped to initiate a pincer movement against Trondheim from these two areas, and by capturing the railway centre at Dombaas to seal off the town from the German forces advancing from the south. These expeditions were known respectively as Maurice (Namsos) and Sickle (Aandalsnes). Each was preceded by preliminary landings by naval parties in order to forestall the Germans and to ensure unopposed landings for the larger forces—Henry consisting of some 350 seamen and marines from ships then working in the neighbourhood at Namsos, and Primrose, about 700 men drawn from heavy ships in dockyard hands, with field howitzers, high angle pom-poms and two 4-in. guns of position, in the Aandalsnes area.[1]

It is to be noted that none of these expeditions was to land in the face of German opposition on shore. Rupert landed in Vaags Fjord, a long way from the enemy in Narvik. The orders for Henry said ' it is not intended that an opposed landing should be attempted ' and the object of that landing was ' to ensure an unopposed landing for Maurice at Namsos '. Similarly, Primrose and Sickle both had orders not to land if the Germans should be already in Aandalsnes.

The plans for the landings in central Norway were only gradually evolved, the first naval orders—which dealt with Namsos—being contained in A.T. 0216/13. The same day the Government decided to land a small party at Aalesund (approaches to Aandalsnes) to ' create a diversion ' and to hinder the passage of the enemy through the Inner Lead in those parts ; but as stated above this grew into an advance against Trondheim similar to that from Namsos.

The general intention of these landings was finally conveyed to the Commander-in-Chief, Home Fleet, by the Admiralty in the following signal, timed 2340/13 :—

> '(i) Government have now decided to land a force in the vicinity of Trondheim, so as to secure a footing from which that place can eventually be taken should it be decided to do so ; and the following action is consequently being taken.
>
> (ii) Operation Henry is being carried out.

[1] Each of these operations will be treated in detail in succeeding chapters.

(iii) A force of about 5000 men will arrive Namsos, probably a.m. 17th April, to hold place and try and advance to Stenkjaer. This will be known as Operation Maurice.

(iv) A force of marines and seamen from *Nelson*, *Barham* and *Hood*, about 600 strong, will land at Aalesund on about 17th April with object of neutralizing Inner Lead, south of Trondheim and create a diversion. This will be known as Operation Primrose.[1]

(v) Action is being taken to keep down scale of attack from Norwegian aerodromes, but attacks by flying boats and float planes must always remain possible.

(vi) In view of above coming to commitment, it is desirable to have more strength in south than at present.'

Three days later, these intentions were amplified by a message from the C.I.G.S. to General Carton de Wiart, who had been appointed Commander of Maurice (A.T. 0020/16) :—

'Capture of Trondheim considered essential. Plan proposed is as follows :—

Intend landing 600 marines at Aandalsnes (not Aalesund), 17th April, to be reinforced, if possible, at earliest opportunity. Propose you should exploit from Namsos, while force from Aandalsnes will also threaten Trondheim in conjunction with Norwegian forces. Meanwhile, combined operation for direct attack on Trondheim will be developed ? to take advantage of your pressure . . . only troops available for reinforcing Aandalsnes are Morgan's brigade.'

This leads up to some consideration of the vexed question whether a frontal attack should have been launched on Trondheim, and what were the chances of success, had such an attack been launched.

23. Question of direct attack on Trondheim [PLAN 11

The project of a direct assault on Trondheim was much to the fore during these early days of the campaign. The following series of signals which passed between the Admiralty and the Commander-in-Chief, Home Fleet, gives an outline of what was intended and throws light on the reasons why the plan was given up.

So far as it concerned the Home Fleet, this proposal, named Operation Hammer, first appeared in A.T. 0142 of 14th April, sent a couple of hours after the message describing the expedition to Namsos :—

'Intention up to present has been to land at Namsos for the Trondheim area. For many reasons it would be advantageous to land the force inside Trondheim Fjord. Do you consider that the shore batteries could be either destroyed or dominated to such an extent as to permit transports to enter ? And, if so, how many ships and of what type would you propose to use ?

Request early reply, as any plan must depend on the above.'

On this, Sir Charles Forbes, who was then cruising off the Lofoten Islands, asked for details about the defences of Trondheim, both Norwegian batteries that might be in German hands and artillery that the invaders brought with them, and in his 1157/14 he gave his answers to the Admiralty questions :—

'Shore batteries could no doubt be either destroyed or dominated by battleship in daylight, swept and screened, if she had high explosive bombardment shells for main armament, but none of Home Fleet have.

This, however, is only the minor part of task.

The main difficulties are (1), surprise having been lost, to protect troopships from a heavy-scale air attack for over 30 miles in narrow waters, and (2) then to carry out an opposed landing, of which ample warning has been given, under continuous air attack. Nothing, to date, has led me to suppose the necessary

[1] A.T. 1347/14 explained : 'This operation is designed to synchronise with Operation Maurice.'

freedom from air attack could be assured for length of time operation would take. In fact, reverse would be the case, as within three hours of being sighted Ju.88 bombers from Germany would be on spot; and if the information contained in your 0109/13 is correct, bombing would start almost immediately.

For foregoing reasons, I do not consider operation feasible, unless you are prepared to face very heavy losses in troops and transports.'[1]

The Admiralty answered him in A.T. 0121 of 15th April :—

'We still think that the operation described should be further studied.

It could not take place for seven days devoted to careful preparation. Danger from air would not be appreciably less wherever these large troopships are brought into the danger zone; in fact, it might be greater whilst the aerodrome at Trondheim is in action. Our idea would be that, in addition to R.A.F. bombing of Stavanger aerodrome, the *Suffolk* should bombard with high explosive at dawn, hoping thereby to put Stavanger aerodrome out of business. The aerodrome at Trondheim, which is close to the harbour, could be dealt with by F.A.A. bombers, and subsequently by bombardment.

(High explosive shell for 15-in. guns has been ordered to Rosyth. The *Furious* and 1st Cruiser Squadron would be required for this operation.)

Pray, therefore, consider this important project further.'

And instructions from the Chief of the Imperial General Staff to General Carton de Wiart at the same time, mainly about the landing of Maurice, contained this clause : 'Development of operations is dependent on capture of Trondheim; combined plan being developed'.

Meanwhile, Sir Charles Forbes had received particulars of the Trondheim defences, estimates of the German and Norwegian strengths in troops in and about Trondheim, and news that the Germans had seized the coastwise batteries at the entrance of Trondheim Fjord—which is there only a mile and a half wide, leading out of Skjorn Fjorden, two and a half miles wide. He answered the Admiralty message in his 1733/15 :—

'(*a*) What is size of force to be landed ?

(*b*) What is precise position in which it is proposed to land them ?

(*c*) What is precise position of Trondheim aerodrome ? I have no shore map.

(*d*) What is role of 1st Cruiser Squadron ?—as they are at present doing very useful work at Kirkenes in accordance with A.T. 0054/14.

(*e*) If *Furious* is to be used, she will have to proceed to base to re-equip squadron, replenish stores, and embark fighter squadron; and she cannot leave before refuelling at Tromsö on 17th April at earliest. This will also deprive Narvik of air co-operation, so suggest *Glorious*.

(*f*) I think you have misunderstood my 1157/14. I do not anticipate any great difficulty from naval side, except that I cannot provide air defence for transports whilst approaching and carrying out an opposed landing—the chief air menace being from Ju.88 machines from Germany. And I know, from personal experience, what an opposed landing is like, even without air opposition.

(*g*) Naval force required would be *Valiant* and *Renown* to give air defence to *Glorious*; *Warspite* to carry out shore bombardments, as she is only 15-in. ship in fleet with 6-in. guns[2]; at least four A.A. cruisers; about 20 destroyers; and numerous landing craft.

(*h*) I request, on my return to Scapa on morning of 18th April, D.C.N.S. or Admiral Holland may be there to discuss whole situation.'

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[1] A.T. 0109/13 reported a dive-bomber group at Vaernes, 15 miles east of Trondheim, and possibly a group of Ju.88's at Narvik.

[2] *Warspite* had 8 15-in., 8 6-in., 8 4-in. H.A. *Valiant* had 8 15-in., 20 4·5-in. *Renown* had 6 15-in., 20 4·5-in. As it turned out, the *Valiant* actually prepared for bombarding, sailing from Scapa for Rosyth on the 19th to ship the special projectiles. The *Renown* sailed with her, but to dock and repair the damage received in the bad weather and her fight on the 9th. The *Resolution* (from the Halifax escort force) relieved the *Warspite* at Narvik, and the latter went to the Mediterranean.

The answer to this came in A.T. 0250 of the 17th, of which this is a digest :—

(*a*) and (*b*) ' One brigade of regulars to take aerodrome by assault ; 1000 Canadian troops, part to capture forts, part to land near Hommelvik, and part to contact Norwegians near Levanger ; 200 Royal Marines to assist in capture of forts.'

(*c*) The true position of Vaernes aerodrome is 63° 27 N., 10° 56 E.

(*d*) 1st Cruiser Squadron : ' Not certain, but detailed plan may prove them necessary, and we must be prepared to put everything into this operation.'

(*e*) and (*f*) *Ark Royal* and *Glorious* to be used, with total of 45 fighter machines ; *Furious* not required.

(*g*) ' Do you propose to relieve *Warspite* by *Repulse*, or would you like *Resolution* to do so ? '

(*h*) Admiral Holland and the General commanding ' Hammer's ' troops would come to Scapa on the 18th, ' provided agreement on general scope of operation is reached to-day,' otherwise on the 19th.

Rear-Admiral Holland arrived on board the Rodney at Scapa on 18th April, bringing with him the plan of the operation, but the General commanding the assault troops (Major-General Hotblack) had suddenly fallen ill in London, and Major-General Berney-Ficklin—hastily appointed to succeed him—was seriously injured together with two of his staff when his aircraft crashed on landing at Hatston airfield on the 19th. The plan as originally conceived had been altered to meet representations by Sir Charles Forbes so that all the assaulting forces would be carried in men of war instead of transports, and was summarised by him as follows[1] :—

(*a*) *Details of embarkation of assault force*

(i) Rosyth, 21st April : Divisional Headquarters in ' W ' Cruiser, Brigade Headquarters and ' C ' Battalion, 15th Brigade, in ' X ' Cruiser and five destroyers, Canadian Battalion in two destroyers and five sloops.

Greenock, 20th April : 'A' Battalion, 15th Brigade, in ' Y ' Cruiser and five destroyers. ' B ' Battalion, 15th Brigade in ' Z ' Cruiser and five destroyers.

(ii) All cruisers to carry approximately 300 men and 30 tons of stores each. Cruisers ' Y ' and ' Z ' also to carry two armoured landing craft and should therefore be *Southampton* class. Cruiser ' X ' should be *Southampton* or *York* class.

(iii) In addition, a Royal Marine battery of 7 3·7-in. howitzers to be embarked. Three guns stores and crews and half Battery Headquarters in each ' Y ' and ' Z ' cruiser. One gun and crew in ' X ' Cruiser.

(iv) Destroyers carrying Canadians to carry 100 men with blankets, tents and 7 days' rations. Remaining destroyers to carry 100 men, blankets and 48 hours' rations.

(v) Sloops to carry 150 men each, with blankets, tents and 7 days' rations.

(vi) Ships concerned to embark H.E. ammunition before sailing, as arranged by Commander-in-Chief, Rosyth, and Flag Officer-in-Charge, Greenock.

(vii) Time of arrival of Troops and gear to be signalled in due course.

(*b*) *Details of embarkation of reserve, 147th Brigade*

(viii) Naval base staff and stores embark on 19th April in *Sobieski* and *Duchess of Athol* at Clyde and in steamship *Orion* at Rosyth. These troops with blankets, tents and 7 days' rations to be transferred at Scapa on 21st April to cruiser detailed.

(ix) *Sobieski* to embark one new type motor landing craft and *Oronsay* one old armoured motor landing craft, both ex s.s. *Empire* after daylight.

[1] Home Fleet Narrative. These proposals were confirmed in A.T. 0117/19.

The details of the naval side of this plan were worked out between 18th and 19th April, but late on the 19th the operation was cancelled.

Up to the 17th, the Chiefs of Staff had been in favour of the attempt ; but ' during the 18th, a vehement and decisive change in the opinion of the Chiefs of Staff and of the Admiralty occurred. This change was brought about first by increasing realisation of the magnitude of the naval stake in hazarding so many of our finest capital ships, and also by War Office arguments that even if the fleet got in and got out again, the opposed landing of the troops in the face of the German Air Power would be perilous '.[1] On 20th April, A.T. 1140/20 to the Commander-in-Chief, Home Fleet, confirmed that ' Hammer is cancelled ' and some six hours later A.T. 1731/20[2] forecast the employment of the Hammer forces in the Aandalsnes area.

But before this Sir Charles Forbes, who from the first had regarded the project with misgivings, had evidently come to the conclusion that it was over-hazardous. A signal sent by him on the 18th, outlining his proposals for the future employment of naval forces, provided for supporting the army at Narvik, Namsos and Aandalsnes, but said of Trondheim only ' operate in inner routes against supplies for enemy military and air forces in Trondheim and Bergen area '.[3] As usual, there was difficulty in collecting enough destroyers to cope with the many calls upon them. His ' destroyers requirements ' were given in a signal sent at 0201, 19th (before A.T. 0117/19, summarised above, reached him), and amounted to 68, of which he earmarked 45 for Hammer ; he then only had 63 at his command and a margin above the 68 to allow for loss or damage was essential. As regards the situation at Trondheim, reports made the German strength to be some 2000 men on the 16th or 17th, chiefly at Vaernes and in the forts that guard the entrance to the fjord, where there were said to be 6-in. and 8-in. guns. The troops were Austrian and Bavarian highlanders, young men, active and well-equipped. Whether they had mobile artillery was doubtful ; but they were strong in the air—at Vaernes and on a frozen lake 5 miles south-east of Trondheim—and they were well off for anti-aircraft guns. Later reports said that more troops were arriving by air, land and sea.

The question whether this assault should have been attempted or not became the subject of considerable public controversy. For this reason, the Commander-in-Chief, Home Fleet, deemed it advisable to put on record his opinion

> . . . that it was a gamble that might have succeeded, but probably would not. It appeared to him that it was only in the fleet, which had had practical experience in the matter, that the scale of air attack that the enemy could develop on the Norwegian coast was properly appreciated. The experience of the attacks on the fleet on 9th and 11th April, and on the *Suffolk*[4] on 17th April, left no doubt in his mind that 45 F.A.A. fighters operating from carriers could not have afforded adequate protection in the circumstances of this assault, which, as he had pointed out, necessitated a long approach in narrow waters.

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[1] Churchill, THE SECOND WORLD WAR, Vol. I, p. 494.

These reasons savour of the opinion expressed by the Commander-in-Chief, Home Fleet, in his signal 1157/14 (*see ante*). At the Admiralty, moreover, there was anxiety about the reserves of H/A ammunition, which were running low ; and the experience of the *Suffolk*, which was seriously damaged by air attack on the 17th, may have influenced the decision. In any case, in view of the commitments at Narvik, Namsos and Aandalsnes, it is difficult to see how the cruisers, destroyers and sloops required for Hammer could have been provided.

[2] *See* Chapter V, Operation Sickle (*postea*).

[3] Commander-in-Chief, H.F., 1203/18 : *see* Sec. 24 *postea*.

[4] *See* Sec. 28 *postea*.

> An opposed landing with very slightly superior forces had to be undertaken which, from previous experience and in view of what happened at Narvik, was bound to be a hazardous operation, and withal the combined operation had to be hastily planned and then performed without any practice at all, in fact *ad hoc*.[1]

With this view the German Naval Staff was in substantial agreement :—

> ' A direct assault on Trondheim would only have been possible in the first days of the German operations, while coastal batteries were still unprepared and before the German Air Force was able to operate effectively against the attacker. Even then the invader could only hope to consolidate his position if, by using extensive air transportation, he could establish air superiority in the Norwegian area and could land a powerfully equipped and modernly trained expeditionary force. In addition the British would have had to prevent any further reinforcements of German troops on the Skagerrak route to southern Norway. Thus it cannot be held against the British if, with their uncertainty as to the actual situation in southern Norway and with ignorance of the results of their submarine attacks in the Kattegat and Skagerrak, they did not decide on a direct attack against the harbours already in German occupation.'[2]

The French view, on the other hand, emerges from the following extracts from the minutes of conversations held in Paris on 22nd and 23rd April. At the first meeting the First Sea Lord (Admiral of the Fleet Sir Dudley Pound) and Vice-Admiral Sir Geoffrey Blake saw Admiral Darlan and Captain Auphan, when the French, runs the minute, ' were emphatic ' that the Norwegian theatre of operations ' is vital, and that nothing short of the actual outbreak of war in the Mediterranean should be allowed to deflect forces from the Allied effort there. They offered further naval help if required. . . .' ' They regarded the capture of Trondheim as vital.'

Next day, Sir Geoffrey Blake saw Admiral le Luc and Captain Auphan. ' The French did not disguise their profound regret that Hammer had been cancelled, and urged that, although the operation would now be a more difficult one, the question of undertaking it should be re-examined.'[3]

There was, too, a considerable body of opinion in the United Kingdom in favour of the attempt, typified by the debates which took place in Parliament.[4]

The question may well provide food for academic debate for many years to come ; but it may be noted that the view of the responsible Naval Commander on the spot, Admiral Sir Charles Forbes, and the considered opinion of the German Naval Staff, were in close agreement that at this stage of the operations —over a week after the original landings, by which time the German defence was a going concern—the attempt was unlikely to have succeeded ; and subsequent events of the Norwegian Campaign tend to confirm this opinion.

24. General employment of Home Fleet, April–June 1940 [PLAN 1

With the abandonment of operation Hammer the Home Fleet settled down to the business of convoying the various expeditions to and from Norway, and rendering such assistance as possible to the troops on shore. Cruisers, destroyers and sloops, as well as merchant ships, served as troopships ; and when troops sailed in unarmed ships one or two cruisers generally accompanied them, besides an anti-submarine screen of destroyers. Thus the convoys had no

[1] Home Fleet, Narrative, para. 230.

[2] B.R. 1840(1), page 60.

[3] It is probable that the French view was influenced by the desire to support any operations in distant Norway which might divert German forces from the attack on France in the near future, which was foreseen and which took place a month later.

[4] H. of C. Deb., Vol. 360, 1126.

great strength (especially those for Aandalsnes), for every cruiser troopship carried several hundred men and sometimes a couple of hundred tons of stores, including guns and wagons. But seemingly the Germans did not intend to hazard their surface craft in attempts on the expeditions while on passage, though they sometimes brought off air attacks. A.T. 1701/19 informed the Commander-in-Chief, Home Fleet, that the Admiralty had ' no reliable reports of main German units later than the 12th, but that it was probable that all their large ships were in their home waters '.[1]

The Commander-in-Chief, Home Fleet, arrived back at Scapa from the Lofoten Islands on 17th April, and the next day he signalled to the Admiralty his ' outline proposals for the future employment ' of the fleet as follows :—

(*a*) Maintain close blockade of Narvik and support military forces there.

(*b*) Support military forces in Namsos and Aandalsnes area.

(*c*) Operate in inner routes against supplies for enemy military and air forces in Trondheim and Bergen area . . . .

(*d*) Submarines to operate in Skagerrak and off south-western coast of Norway against enemy lines of communication.

(*e*) Sweep by surface forces into Skagerrak to be undertaken to relieve pressure of enemy anti-submarine measures when weather conditions are suitable—*vide* my 2009/17th April. (Such a sweep ' not an operation of war except in fog, due to air attacks enemy can bring to bear '.)

(*f*) Kattegat to be intensively mined up to limit of Swedish territorial waters, both by magnetic and contact mines, starting from southward and working north.

(*g*) Continuous harassing of all enemy aerodromes in Norway, except in Narvik area, to be a special task of Royal Air Force.

In pursuance of this policy the *Warspite* flying Vice-Admiral Whitworth's flag remained in support of Lord Cork till 24th April, when she proceeded to Scapa and the Clyde *en route* for the Mediterranean, her place in the Narvik area being taken on 26th April by the *Resolution*, detached from the Halifax escort force. The *Repulse* sailed from Scapa on 17th April to protect the first French convoy to Namsos, but she was diverted to the assistance of the *Suffolk*, which had been disabled by air attack, and did not join the convoy till the last day of its passage (19th). She then took a single transport to Vaags Fjord afterwards returning to Scapa, where she stayed till June. As to the remainder of the capital ships of the Home Fleet, the *Rodney* remained at Scapa till the German raid on homecoming convoys from Narvik in June ; the *Renown* went to Rosyth for repairs, rejoining the fleet towards the end of May ; and the *Valiant* went out again at the end of April for service in the central Norwegian area.

The Home Fleet destroyers (apart from a dozen or so with Lord Cork in the Narvik Squadron) were required for convoy duty almost continuously throughout the campaign. Some had other service on the coast, and together with cruisers, A.A. cruisers, sloops and small craft did fine work in support of the military forces on shore, which will be described in succeeding chapters on the various landings.

Under clause (*c*) of the Commander-in-Chief's proposals four destroyers cruised in the Inner Lead about Trondheim in pairs between 21st and 28th April, with occasional breaks when ships had to go home for oil or were required for convoys. The *Ashanti* and *Mohawk*, *Somali* and *Tartar*, *Sikh* and

[1] Actually, apart from destroyers, submarines and small craft the *Köln* and *Emden* were the only undamaged ships at the disposal of the Germans at this date.

Nubian all took part in this patrol ; they found no enemy at sea, but the *Nubian* and *Ashanti* suffered slightly from near misses in an air attack on the 28th. Vice-Admiral Layton supported the patrol during the nights of the 26th and 27th with the *Manchester* and *Birmingham* after landing troops at Molde and Aandalsnes ; and two nights later (29th) mines were laid in Trondheim Lead by the *Ivanhoe, Icarus* and *Impulsive* (Operation Z.M.A.).

The month of May saw a considerable reduction in the Home Fleet effectives. The German threat to the Low Countries was becoming plainer every day and on 7th May Vice-Admiral Edward-Collins in the *Galatea,* with the *Arethusa,* was sent to Sheerness, and eight destroyers[1] to Harwich to work under the Commander-in-Chief, The Nore.

On the same day, the *Berwick* and *Glasgow* embarked the 2nd Battalion, R.M. Brigade, under Colonel R. G. Sturges, at Greenock, and sailed next morning for Iceland, escorted by the *Fearless* and *Fortune.* Reykjavik was occupied without incident on 10th May,[2] and the two cruisers then proceeded to Liverpool for long refits, the destroyers returning to Scapa.

On the 14th, increased tension with Italy caused the transfer of the eight destroyers detached to Harwich and in addition nine more,[3] with the A.A. cruiser *Carlisle* and three sloops, to the Mediterranean. Taking into account the numbers under repair from war damage, those working in the Narvik area under Lord Cork and those required for Narvik convoys, this latter detachment left the Commander-in-Chief, Home Fleet, with no destroyers for screening heavy ships for the rest of the month. Three more destroyers[4] were ordered to the Humber on 18th May, and on the 26th Vice-Admiral Layton, with the *Manchester, Birmingham* and *Sheffield* was also sent there and placed under the command of the Commander-in-Chief, The Nore.

25. Carrier and F.A.A. operations

The carriers and Fleet Air Arm played a conspicuous part throughout the campaign. The vital need was to neutralise the strong German Air Force, firstly by providing fighter cover over ports of disembarkation and ships engaged in it ; secondly by giving air reconnaissance, air spotting and ground attack ; and thirdly by air attack on enemy airfields, depots and transport, both ashore and afloat. For the first two requirements the home bases were too far distant for the employment of R.A.F. fighters ; for the third, the limited numbers of R.A.F. bombers available and the distances to be flown rendered help by naval aircraft essential.

At the beginning of the campaign, the only carrier in home waters was the *Furious.* As already mentioned, she arrived in Norwegian waters on 11th April and when the Commander-in-Chief shaped course for Scapa on 15th April, she remained working under Lord Cork in the Narvik area until the 26th. She had no fighters embarked and by that time her two T.S.R. Squadrons had lost 50 per cent of their numbers ;[5] she herself had sustained damage to her turbines by a near miss, and she then proceeded to Greenock for repairs.

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[1] *Janus, Hyperion, Hereward, Havock, Kelly, Kimberley, Kandahar, Hostile.* The *Kelly* was damaged in an operation on 9th May (*see* Sec. 28 *postea*) and never got to Harwich.

[2] The Royal Marines arrived back in the Clyde on 24th May in the transports *Franconia* and *Lancastria,* which had brought an infantry brigade to relieve them on the 17th.

[3] *Hero, Hasty, Ilex, Imperial, Juno, Mohawk, Nubian, Khartoum, Kingston.*

[4] *Fury, Fortune, Foresight.*

[5] *See* App. F.

The *Glorious* and the *Ark Royal* from the Mediterranean joined the Home Fleet at Scapa on 23rd April, and sailed for central Norway the same day under Vice-Admiral Wells, flying his flag in the *Ark Royal*, with the *Berwick*, *Curlew* and six destroyers[1] (Operation DX). Their object was to provide fighter protection for the southern expedition; to attack the enemy in Trondheim; and to land some Royal Air Force machines to work from the frozen Lake Lesjaskog (between Aandalsnes and Dombaas), known to the squadron as 'Gladiator Lake'.

The R.A.F. Squadron of Gladiators was flown off the *Glorious* between 1730 and 1800 on 24th April, and reached their landing ground without opposition, but the lake was shortly afterwards heavily bombed and all the R.A.F. aircraft were put out of action. All fighter support then devolved on the carriers' naval aircraft.

The carriers sent up fighters to patrol over Aandalsnes as soon as snow allowed in the evening of 24th April and each day afterwards up to the 28th a few aircraft patrolled over Aandalsnes or Namsos. In the course of these patrols, fighters engaged enemy aircraft attacking the railways, the airfield on 'Gladiator Lake' and two convoys approaching Aandalsnes; they also helped to defend the *Flamingo* lying at that port. Apart from this work, the carriers kept anti-submarine and fighter patrols in the air 'whenever submarine or enemy aircraft attack was likely'.[2]

On 27th April the *Glorious* was detached to fuel, rejoining on 1st May; the *Sheffield* relieved the *Curlew* as radar guardship on the 28th, being relieved in her turn by the *Valiant* on the 30th, and oiling requirements occasioned changes in the destroyer screen; otherwise the squadron operated till the night of 1st May.

Admiral Wells worked from positions about 120 miles from the targets or patrol areas, going to seaward between operations—except the first day, when the aircraft had 400 miles to fly on passage alone, which the Admiral described as 'a very hazardous flight, most gallantly carried out'.[2] Bombing attacks on Trondheim were made by 34 aircraft on 25th April and by 18 (the *Glorious* having by then parted company) on the 28th. No German warships were seen there, but merchant shipping was attacked; and heavy damage was inflicted on the airfield and naval aircraft at Vaernes, especially by the raid on the 25th.

In the evening of the 28th the squadron drew off to seaward to rest the airmen 'who had been in action for five successive days' and 'were showing definite signs of strain'.[2] The carriers, too, had not been without excitement; enemy aircraft attacked them on the 28th, when the *Ark Royal* shot down an enemy machine, and there were encounters with submarines on the 27th and 29th.

Admiral Wells moved in again on 30th April in order to provide cover for the troops retreating from Aandalsnes next day. The *Glorious* rejoined his flag on 1st May, bringing fresh aircraft to replace casualties and to cover the retreat from Namsos, scheduled for 2nd–3rd May, the Royal Air Force then taking over the protection of the Aandalsnes expedition. But throughout 1st May the squadron was subjected to air attacks, which occupied the attention of the fighters intended to augment the patrols over Namsos, and the German bombs

[1] *Hyperion, Hereward, Hasty, Fearless, Fury, Juno.*

[2] Report of V.A. (A). Operation DX.

fell sometimes ' unpleasantly close '. These attacks convinced the Vice-Admiral that he could no longer ' maintain a position from which aircraft could give support to our forces ' and, with the approval of the Commander-in-Chief, he accordingly withdrew that evening, and crossing the North Sea in 65° N., came west of the Shetlands to Scapa, arriving on 3rd May.

During these operations, the squadron estimated that they had destroyed 21 enemy aircraft (not counting the seaplanes in Trondheim Fjord), besides damaging a further 20 ; their own losses amounted to 13 aircraft destroyed and two rendered unserviceable.

With the failure of the campaign in central Norway the focus of naval interest once more shifted to Lord Cork's command. Vice-Admiral Wells only remained at Scapa long enough to make good aircraft losses, and sailed on 4th May in the *Ark Royal* for the Narvik area. There she remained till 24th May, providing fighters for the Narvik and Bodo areas, until R.A.F. landing grounds had been prepared, and launching almost daily attacks by Skuas and Swordfish on enemy railway lines, military stores, etc. During this period the *Furious* transported R.A.F. fighters and landed them at Bardufoss (21st May) and the *Glorious* six Walruses to Harstad (18th May), and Hurricanes to Bardufoss (26th May), as the newly prepared airfields became ready. After a brief interval between 25th and 30th May in Home Waters, the *Ark Royal* and *Glorious* once more proceeded to the Narvik area in connection with the final evacuation—a service from which the *Glorious* never returned.

The contribution of the Fleet Air Arm to the campaign was not limited to the work of the carrier-borne aircraft. Mention has already been made of the eminently successful attack by Skuas from Hatston on the *Königsberg* in Bergen (*see* Sec. 12 *ante*). A number of attacks were carried out from this base during April and May against enemy shipping, small war vessels and oil tanks. During three attacks in May the Squadron (806) was escorted by R.A.F. Blenheims. Surprise was attained on every occasion and British losses were small ; the success of the dive bombing method of attack seemed to be confirmed. Three attacks against oil tanks were particularly successful, resulting in the almost complete destruction of three separate oil depots.

Between 18th May and 6th June, a squadron of six Walruses was based on Harstad, whence they were employed on anti-submarine patrols, convoying, occasional ferrying and especially communication duties—a difficult problem in that mountainous country, broken by waterways and with few roads. Out of some 250 flights during the period, more than three-quarters were devoted to transporting British and French officers on such missions. The base was closed down on 6th June and the squadron re-embarked in the *Ark Royal ;* on the last day, however, the five remaining Walruses carried out a spirited bombing attack on German troops and installations at Solfolla.

In addition to these duties directly in connection with the Allied expeditions, minelaying operations were carried out by Swordfish (specially equipped with long distance tanks) from Hatston ; the first of these took place in the narrow Inner Lead channel south of Haugesund (between Bergen and Stavanger) on the night of 17th/18th May. And throughout the operations, land based F.A.A. fighters from Hatston and Wick maintained the air defence of Scapa, while Swordfish carried out anti-submarine operations as required. If any had previously doubted the necessity of a naval air arm or the scope of the operations it might legitimately be called upon to perform, surely the events in Norway from April to June 1940 gave the answer in no uncertain terms.

26. Employment of A.A. cruisers and sloops

The individual efforts of A.A. cruisers and sloops will appear in the succeeding chapters on the landing operations ; but some general indication of their services will not be out of place at this stage. In the words of the Commander-in-Chief, Home Fleet, ' the scale of air attack that would be developed against our military forces on shore and our naval forces off the Norwegian coast was greviously under-estimated when the operations were undertaken. In the result, when the situation on shore became desperate, we were committed and desperate measures had to be taken '.[1] In the absence of Allied fighters and adequate A.A. defences, any expedient which might mitigate the severity of the attacks on the Allied bases had to be resorted to. A.A. cruisers and sloops seemed the readiest means at hand, though they would be severely handicapped by operating in confined waters, surrounded by high cliffs.

Accordingly on 21st April the Commander-in-Chief, Home Fleet, received orders from the Admiralty that an A.A. ship or sloop was to be kept at Namsos and Aandalsnes, the *Black Swan, Auckland, Pelican* and *Fleetwood* being placed under his orders for this purpose (A.T. 1929/21). The next day further orders from the Admiralty (A.T. 1037/22) directed that two of these ships should be kept at both Namsos and Aandalsnes, and added the *Bittern* and *Flamingo* to the Force.

Meanwhile, H.M.S. *Carlisle*, flying the flag of Rear-Admiral Vivian, had arrived at Aandalsnes on 20th April, where she remained till the 22nd, later moving to Namsos ; there she stayed—except for a trip to Skjel Fjord for fuel —till the evacuation on the night of 2nd/3rd May. The *Calcutta* was at Namsos from 22nd to 27th, when she proceeded to Aandalsnes and was there during the final evacuation on the night of 1st/2nd May. The *Curacoa* arrived at Aandalsnes on the night of 21st/22nd April, but was seriously damaged by a bomb on the 24th and returned to the United Kingdom escorted by the *Flamingo*, which had arrived there that afternoon. The *Flamingo* returned to Aandalsnes early on the 26th, sailing the same night after expending all her ammunition.

The *Black Swan* and *Auckland* were already in Norwegian waters when the Admiralty orders reached the Commander-in-Chief. The *Black Swan* was hit at Aandalsnes on the 28th by a bomb which went right through the ship, doing surprisingly little damage, but enough to force her to return to the United Kingdom. The *Auckland* arrived at Namsos on 22nd April and sailed in the evening of the 24th, having fired practically all her ammunition. She returned to Aandalsnes on the 30th, and remained there till the final evacuation. The *Pelican* was hit by a bomb and had her stern blown off on 22nd April, while still some 50 miles from the shore on her way to Aandalsnes ; she eventually reached Lerwick on the 24th in tow of the *Fleetwood* which had just parted company from her for Namsos when she was hit. The *Fleetwood* was employed subsequently at Aandalsnes from the 29th to 30th ; then, having expended most of her ammunition, she returned to Scapa with some evacuated personnel. The *Bittern* was at Namsos from 24th to 30th April, when she was hit and set on fire by dive bombers ; after survivors had been taken off she was sunk by torpedo in 100 fathoms by order of Read-Admiral Vivian.

Commenting on this employment of these ships, the Commander-in-Chief, Home Fleet, remarked that it became evident at an early stage that the slight degree of protection that they could afford to the bases, being due mainly to the fact that they were primarily chosen as targets by the bombers, was out of all

[1] Home Fleet Narrative, para. 269.

proportion to their expenditure of ammunition and the damage they were sustaining. Although he realised that the moral effect of their presence was considerable he was of the opinion that the use of the ships for this purpose was wasteful and that considerable reinforcements would be required owing to the number of ships that had been damaged. This view he represented to the Admiralty on 26th April[1] and on the next day, owing to the heavy attacks on them, he ordered the A.A. guardships to withdraw during daylight hours.

27. A/S trawlers on the Norwegian coast

Some mention should be made here of the work of the A/S trawlers. On 13th April, the Admiralty ordered the 21st A/S Striking Force and the 23rd A/S Group to sail from Scotland for Namsos, and on the 17th the 12th and 22nd A/S Groups to sail for Aandalsnes. These were followed later by the 15th and 16th A/S Striking Forces, which went to Namsos.[2]

These trawlers were sent to Norway primarily to give A/S protection to H.M. ships and transports in the fjords, but no sooner had they arrived than they were subjected to frequent heavy air attacks, high level and dive bombing and machine gunning, which made it suicidal for them to carry out A/S patrols except during the few hours of darkness. They suffered severe casualties, eleven out of a total of 29 being sunk or driven ashore. During daylight hours, after the first day or two, they were forced to take shelter under high cliffs, partly to evade bombing and partly to rest their crews. While so placed, some of the crews endeavoured to camouflage their vessels with evergreen and small trees and themselves took refuge on shore, in some instances leaving their guns' crews on board to engage the enemy aircraft ; but even when on shore, the crews were machine-gunned on the hillside.

As most of the work of disembarking troops and stores and the evacuation were done at night, some of the trawlers did useful work ferrying between the transports and the shore, while others were employed on A/S patrols. ' Despite these arduous and hazardous conditions ', wrote the Commander-in-Chief, Home Fleet, ' the morale and gallantry of officers and men remained magnificent '.[3]

As an example of what could be done by these little ships with scratch crews, if well led, the Commander-in-Chief went on to give some details from a report written by Lieutenant R. B. Stannard,[4] who was in command of the *Arab* :—

> ' In the early afternoon of 28th April, after a heavy bombing attack which had started fires among the stores and ammunition on the pier at Namsos, the *Arab* and *Angle* were ordered to tow off the transport *Saumur*, which was aground with a wire round her propeller. The *Angle* managed to get her off alone, so the *Arab* returned to the burning pier and her Commanding Officer, keeping her bows in by going slow ahead, ran two hoses over the forecastle and tried to put out the burning ammunition dump. While thus engaged, another air attack by sixteen planes developed, and as there was no hope of putting out the fire he left and went down the fiord.

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[1] Commander-in-Chief 1030/26. In the same signal he recommended that immediate steps should be taken to establish A.A. ground defences and adequate R.A.F. fighter protection, both at Aandalsnes and Namsos ; and that endeavour should be made to ascertain whether any suitable localities for landing grounds existed north of Namsos, as he had by this time become convinced that the use of Mosjoen or Kongsmoen was essential as a landing place for army stores, if we were to maintain our forces in this area.

[2] *See* Appendix A(1) Composition of forces and brief statement of their movements.

[3] Home Fleet Narrative.

[4] H.M. The King approved the award of the Victoria Cross to Lieutenant Stannard for his gallantry during these operations.

On 30th April, after helping H.M.S. *Bittern* to drive off air attacks and helping other trawlers in various ways, he decided to put his crew ashore. He landed Lewis guns, food and blankets, and had them taken to a large cave, and then established a number of machine-gun posts at the top of the cliff. There the crew slept with look-outs on duty.

Next day, the *Aston Villa* made fast about 100 yards south of the *Arab*. There was continuous bombing and machine-gunning by high and dive bombers which came over in flights of six, nine and twelve planes. The positions ashore were also machine-gunned. The *Gaul* was hit and sank. The crews of the three trawlers then manned the positions ashore. The *Aston Villa* was set on fire by a direct hit from a dive bomber. Luckily only a few of her crew were still on board. The wounded were rescued and transferred in extemporised stretchers to the top of the cliff. As the *Aston Villa* was still on fire and in danger of blowing up, Lieutenant Stannard, with two others boarded the *Arab*, cut her lines and succeeded in moving her another 100 yards away before the explosion occurred.

Finally, when leaving the fjord in his damaged vessel to return to Scapa after five days at Namsos, he was attacked by a single German bomber which ordered him to steer east or be sunk. Instead, he continued his course, held his fire until the aircraft was about 800 yards away, and then opened fire with every gun on board and brought the aircraft down '.[1]

28. The Southern Area : Surface operations [PLAN 1

Operations by surface craft off the southern coasts of Norway had been virtually ruled out—except on special occasions—by the Commander-in-Chief, Home Fleet, with the concurrence of the Admiralty, and this area was mainly left to submarines. Three operations by surface craft were, however, carried out ; the first—a bombardment of Stavanger airfield by the *Suffolk* on 17th April—certainly confirmed the Commander-in-Chief's appreciation of the power of the German Air Force. The bombardment (Operation Duck) was ordered by the Admiralty in support of the Naval landing at Aandalsnes (Operation Primrose) and its object was defined as ' to inflict the greatest possible damage to the aerodrome so as to restrict the operation of aircraft therefrom '.

The *Suffolk* (Captain J. W. Durnford) screened by the *Kipling, Juno, Janus* and *Hereward* towing T.S.D.S. sailed from Scapa in the afternoon of 16th April and crossed the North Sea at 26 knots ; at 0414, 17th April, the submarine *Seal* which had been ordered to mark position 'A' (58° 57′ N., 5° 10′ E.) was sighted and five minutes later a spotting Walrus was catapulted from the *Suffolk*. At 0432, the *Seal* was passed on a course of 110°, and at about this time rockets and A.A. gunfire were sighted, presumably coming from the defences of the airfield. This prevented the identification of a flare which a R.A.F. Hudson was to drop to indicate the position of the target. It was then getting fairly light ; the land could be seen, but with no detail ; the sea was calm, sky clear, with a light easterly wind. At 0445 speed was reduced to 15 knots and two minutes later the force turned to the bombarding course of 181°, a second Walrus being catapulted at about this time. Unfortunately wireless communication with the aircraft could not be established and in consequence the bombardment did not start till 0513, the range being about 20,000 yards. Three runs were carried out, in the course of which 202 rounds were fired. The failure of wireless communication with the aircraft was ' most disappointing and inevitably had an adverse effect on the bombardment '[2] ; nevertheless, casualties were caused to the German naval air contingent there, two petrol dumps were destroyed and other damage inflicted.

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[1] Home Fleet Narrative.

[2] Commanding Officer, *Suffolk*, report.

After an hour in the air in the vicinity of the airfield, the two Walruses and the Hudson returned to Scotland, and at 0604 the force commenced its withdrawal at 30 knots, steering 270°. Orders had been received from the Admiralty the previous evening (A.T. 2300/16) for the force to sweep to the northward on completion of Operation Duck, in order to intercept enemy destroyers; Captain Durnford accordingly stood to the westward till 0704 and then altered course to the northward, reducing speed to 25 knots (to conserve fuel) and informing the Admiralty of his position, course and speed at 0720. Fighter escort had been arranged with Coastal Command, but this failed to make contact—it subsequently transpired, because the fighters had apparently expected the force to sweep north close inshore. Thus it came about that the squadron was entirely dependent on its own resources in event of air attack.

This was not long in coming. The first attack took place at 0825, when an emergency air attack report was made. From then on, the *Suffolk* was under continuous attack—both high level and dive bombing—for six hours and 47 minutes.[1] After about an hour and a quarter, Captain Durnford decided to withdraw to the westward, as offering the best chance of obtaining air support as early as possible. At 1037 the ship was hit by a heavy bomb, which caused very severe damage, put 'X' and 'Y' turrets out of action, reduced her speed to 18 knots and caused flooding to the extent of some 1,500 tons of water in 20 minutes. Repeated requests for fighter support, giving the position, failed to have any apparent effect.

Meanwhile, the attacks continued. By 1305 both steering motors were out of action but temporary repairs were effected 20 minutes later; near misses, which blew in lower deck scuttles and punctured the ship's side, caused further extensive flooding. Help was, however, on its way. At 1119, the Commander-in-Chief, Home Fleet, then nearing Scapa from the Lofoten Islands, ordered all Skuas at Hatston to be sent to the *Suffolk*'s assistance; he also sent the *Renown* and the *Repulse*, the latter of which was screening the first French convoy to the northward.[2] The Commander-in-Chief, Rosyth, informed the *Suffolk* at 1140 that three Blenheims and three Hudsons should reach ~~him~~ her by 1230.

It was not, however, till 1415 that friendly aircraft were observed arriving; by 1430, nine were in company, but despite this there were four attacks between then and 1512—with the exception of the one which hit 'the most dangerous and accurate experienced.'[3] At 1620 the two battlecruisers were sighted ahead, and eventually the *Suffolk* managed to struggle into Scapa on 18th April with her quarterdeck awash.[4] She was beached at Longhope for temporary repairs and sailed for the Clyde on 5th May for permanent repairs.

Within a week of the *Suffolk*'s return to Scapa, a sweep into the Skagerrak by the French contre-torpilleurs *L'Indomptable*, *Le Malin* and *Le Triomphant* was arranged by the Admiralty. By this time the enemy anti-submarine

[1] Thirty-three attacks took place (21 high level, 12 dive bombing), in the course of which 88 splashes were observed. (*See* App. E.)

[2] 'The Commander-in-Chief, Home Fleet, was at sea when this operation was ordered and carried out. He took it for granted that a very strong air escort would be provided, since the *Suffolk* would be within range of enemy air bases, including those in Germany; and he also took it for granted, in view of the *Norfolk*'s experience at Scapa on 16th March, that the vulnerability of these ships to even a 250-kg. bomb was fully appreciated.' Home Fleet Narrative.

[3] Commanding officer, H.M.S. *Suffolk*, report. Captain Durnford remarked that the fighters in pursuit of the enemy appeared to have left the overhead area unguarded.

[4] For the last 164 miles she was steered by her screws, the steering gear having finally broken down at 1604, 17th.

measures were making themselves felt and the operation was aimed at the destruction of their patrols. The force left Rosyth in the afternoon of 23rd April, intending to cross the meridian of 6° 13′ E. at 2100 and that of Kristiansund south before 0500, 24th. The force entered the Skagerrak unobserved, and during the night sank two motor torpedo boats and a trawler and damaged a second trawler.[1] When retiring across the North Sea at high speed, the destroyers were heavily attacked by aircraft, despite a battle flight escort, but escaped without damage. Two aircraft of the escort, however, were shot down by enemy fighters.

On only one other occasion during the campaign did surface forces operate in the waters to the south-west of Norway. This was a sweep directed against enemy minelaying forces on 9th/10th May. By this time the withdrawal from central Norway had been completed and the centre of naval interest was shifting to the southward.

At 0900, 9th, the Commander-in-Chief, Home Fleet, received information from the Admiralty (A.T. 0827) of the probable positions of two enemy forces near the Little Fisher bank that evening. As it happened, the *Birmingham*, with the *Janus*, *Hyperion*, *Hereward* and *Havock* had left Rosyth bound to the southward at 0645, 9th. These ships were ordered by the Admiralty to steer 080°, 20 knots, after passing May Island ; and at the same time, Captain (D) 5 (Captain Lord Louis Mountbatten), in the *Kelly* with the *Kimberley* and the *Kandahar* with the *Hostile*, which were then just to the southward of St. Abbs Head, were ordered to turn to the northward and join the *Birmingham*. The Commander-in-Chief, Home Fleet, sailed a further unit of five destroyers, the *Fury*, *Foresight*, *Mohawk*, *Bulldog* and *Gallant* from Scapa at 1150.

Instructions to these forces were signalled by the Commander-in-Chief at 1024. The *Birmingham* and her destroyers were directed to pass through 56° 39′ N., 3° 37′ E. at 1930, 9th, and then to steer 097° to meet an enemy force of three destroyers, one torpedo boat and four minelayers which were expected to approach that position from 56° 28′ N., 6° 10′ E. The *Fury* and her group were to be in 57° 21′ N., 2° 22′ E. at 1850, where six enemy motor torpedo boats were expected to be encountered. After sinking them, this group was to join the *Birmingham* at high speed. If nothing was sighted by 2230, all forces were to search back to the westward. Air escort by fighters was arranged for the *Birmingham*.

Lord Louis Mountbatten's destroyers joined the *Birmingham* in the afternoon, but the *Kimberley* soon afterwards had to return to Rosyth owing to shortage of fuel. The remainder of the forces continued to the eastward. The prospects seemed promising, but they were doomed to disappointment.

At 1940, an enemy report from a reconnaissance aircraft was received ; it placed the force expected—four minelayers, three destroyers and a transport barge [*sic*]—in 57° 12′ N., 5° 30′ E., steering 080°. Unfortunately, no amplifying report giving the speed was made. This position was about 70 miles east-north-east of the expected position (which the *Birmingham* had reached) and on the assumption that the enemy was retiring at speed, there was little chance of overtaking him before he reached the Skaw ; our forces therefore continued in accordance with their instructions. It was not till nearly hours later (0232, 10th May) that an amplifying enemy [illegible]

Page 66-ADD new footnote 1.

1. This report seems to have been exaggerated. According to German information only two A/S trawlers were engaged, of which one was damaged. P. 3/56

Meanwhile the *Kelly* and *Kandahar*, which had been detached to hunt a submarine at 1935, had not received the original enemy report till 2018, when the *Birmingham* was nearly out of sight ahead. Both destroyers immediately proceeded at high speed to join her, but visibility was falling and they did not in fact do so during the operation. They were, however, joined at 2050 by the *Bulldog*, which had become detached from the *Fury*'s force at 1730 when sinking a floating mine and had afterwards (at 1958) ineffectively engaged what appeared to be a motor yacht, which escaped to the eastward at high speed making smoke. Unfortunately, the *Bulldog* made no enemy report.

At 2235 the *Kelly* and *Kandahar*, being then in 56° 48′ N., 5° 9′ E. sighted enemy motor torpedo boats. One,[1] which was lying almost stopped in the track of our destroyers, fired torpedoes at the visibility distance of about four cables and hit the *Kelly* under the bridge. During the next hour and a half there were several contacts with motor torpedo boats ; the *Kandahar* reported two at 2240, the *Birmingham* one at 2256 and the *Hostile* one at 2353. Attempts to sink these were unsuccessful, and they retired under their own smoke.

Meanwhile the *Kelly* had been badly damaged—a fact which was not known till 0013, 10th May, when a signal timed 2300, 9th, from the *Bulldog* was received. The *Bulldog* took the *Kelly* in tow, and subsequently reported that no other ships were in company and she was steering 262° at 7 knots. Visibility was very bad, and at 0010, 10th, an enemy motor torpedo boat rammed both destroyers, further damaging the *Kelly*. The *Bulldog* sustained minor damage only, and the motor torpedo boat was thought to have sunk.

As a result of these reports, the *Birmingham* and all destroyers taking part in the operation were ordered to cover the withdrawal of the *Kelly*, and Vice-Admiral Layton in the *Manchester*, with the *Sheffield*, was sailed from Scapa to assist. Air protection for the whole force was arranged. But that night big events were taking place to the south ; Holland and Belgium were invaded, and at 0616, 10th, the *Birmingham* and all the destroyers except two as escort for the *Kelly* in tow were ordered to proceed towards Terschelling at maximum speed.

Admiral Layton made contact with the tow at 1507, 10th, and covered the withdrawal till the next afternoon, when he was ordered to Rosyth by the Commander-in-Chief, owing to the suspected presence of U-boats. The whole force was bombed by enemy aircraft off and on the whole time. Tugs reached the *Kelly* and had her in tow by 0430, 12th May, and she eventually reached the Tyne at 1600, 13th, ' very largely due ' in the words of the Commander-in-Chief, Home Fleet, ' to the fine determined spirit shown by Captain the Lord Louis Mountbatten, G.C.V.O.'[2]

29. The Southern Area : Submarine activities 15th April–May

For the first three weeks of the campaign, Allied submarines continued to harass the German supply lines in the Skagerrak and Kattegat. As time went on, however, two factors were increasingly against them, viz. shorter hours of darkness and increased German anti-submarine measures, and added to these was the need to conserve and re-dispose them for the impending invasion of the Low Countries. For these reasons, the patrols in the Skagerrak and Kattegat with the exception of the minelayers *Narwhal* and *Seal* were mainly withdrawn

[1] It was thought this M.T.B. might have been co-operating with a Dornier aircraft which had been engaged by the *Kelly* at 2052.

[2] Home Fleet Narrative.

measures were making themselves felt and the operation was aimed at the destruction of their patrols. The force left Rosyth in the afternoon of 23rd April, intending to cross the meridian of 6° 13′ E. at 2100 and that of Kristiansund south before 0500, 24th. The force entered the Skagerrak unobserved, and during the night sank two motor torpedo boats and a trawler and damaged a second trawler.[1] When retiring across the North Sea at high speed, the destroyers were heavily attacked by aircraft, despite a battle flight escort, but escaped without damage. Two aircraft of the escort, however, were shot down by enemy fighters.

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At 1940, an enemy report from a reconnaissance aircraft was received ; it placed the force expected—four minelayers, three destroyers and a transport barge [*sic*]—in 57° 12′ N., 5° 30′ E., steering 080°. Unfortunately, no amplifying report giving the speed was made. This position was about 70 miles east-north-east of the expected position (which the *Birmingham* had reached) and on the assumption that the enemy was retiring at speed, there was little chance of overtaking him before he reached the Skaw ; our forces therefore continued in accordance with their instructions. It was not till nearly seven hours later (0232, 10th May) that an amplifying report giving the speed of the enemy as 6 knots was received, and it was then realised that contact would have been possible about 2300 the previous evening.

[1] Made at 2335/9 from Area Headquarters, Donibristle, after the sighting aircraft had landed.

Meanwhile the *Kelly* and *Kandahar*, which had been detached to hunt a submarine at 1935, had not received the original enemy report till 2018, when the *Birmingham* was nearly out of sight ahead. Both destroyers immediately proceeded at high speed to join her, but visibility was falling and they did not in fact do so during the operation. They were, however, joined at 2050 by the *Bulldog*, which had become detached from the *Fury*'s force at 1730 when sinking a floating mine and had afterwards (at 1958) ineffectively engaged what appeared to be a motor yacht, which escaped to the eastward at high speed making smoke. Unfortunately, the *Bulldog* made no enemy report.

At 2235 the *Kelly* and *Kandahar*, being then in 56° 48′ N., 5° 9′ E. sighted enemy motor torpedo boats. One,[1] which was lying almost stopped in the track of our destroyers, fired torpedoes at the visibility distance of about four cables and hit the *Kelly* under the bridge. During the next hour and a half there were several contacts with motor torpedo boats ; the *Kandahar* reported two at 2240, the *Birmingham* one at 2256 and the *Hostile* one at 2353. Attempts to sink these were unsuccessful, and they retired under their own smoke.

Meanwhile the *Kelly* had been badly damaged—a fact which was not known till 0013, 10th May, when a signal timed 2300, 9th, from the *Bulldog* was received. The *Bulldog* took the *Kelly* in tow, and subsequently reported that no other ships were in company and she was steering 262° at 7 knots. Visibility was very bad, and at 0010, 10th, an enemy motor torpedo boat rammed both destroyers, further damaging the *Kelly*. The *Bulldog* sustained minor damage only, and the motor torpedo boat was thought to have sunk.

As a result of these reports, the *Birmingham* and all destroyers taking part in the operation were ordered to cover the withdrawal of the *Kelly*, and Vice-Admiral Layton in the *Manchester*, with the *Sheffield*, was sailed from Scapa to assist. Air protection for the whole force was arranged. But that night big events were taking place to the south ; Holland and Belgium were invaded, and at 0616, 10th, the *Birmingham* and all the destroyers except two as escort for the *Kelly* in tow were ordered to proceed towards Terschelling at maximum speed.

Admiral Layton made contact with the tow at 1507, 10th, and covered the withdrawal till the next afternoon, when he was ordered to Rosyth by the Commander-in-Chief, owing to the suspected presence of U-boats. The whole force was bombed by enemy aircraft off and on the whole time. Tugs reached the *Kelly* and had her in tow by 0430, 12th May, and she eventually reached the Tyne at 1600, 13th, ' very largely due ' in the words of the Commander-in-Chief, Home Fleet, ' to the fine determined spirit shown by Captain the Lord Louis Mountbatten, G.C.V.O.'[2]

29. The Southern Area : Submarine activities 15th April–May

For the first three weeks of the campaign, Allied submarines continued to harass the German supply lines in the Skagerrak and Kattegat. As time went on, however, two factors were increasingly against them, viz. shorter hours of darkness and increased German anti-submarine measures, and added to these was the need to conserve and re-dispose them for the impending invasion of the [illegible]. For these reasons, the patrols in the Skagerrak and Kattegat *Narwhal* and *Seal* were mainly withdrawn

on 28th April,[1] many of the smaller submarines being employed in the southern part of the North Sea during the invasion of the Low Countries and subsequent events, while the larger submarines continued the attack on enemy communications further north along the Norwegian coast.

But before they were withdrawn from the Eastern Skagerrak and Kattegat attacks on the German convoys were of almost daily occurrence and many successes were scored. Thus on 15th April the *Sterlet* sank the *Brummer* which was escorting a convoy, and the *Snapper* two A/S trawlers ; on the 18th, the *Seawolf* seriously damaged two ships in convoy, setting one on fire and sinking her ; the *Triad* attacked a convoy on the 20th, and the *Tetrarch* a large transport on the 24th—both, however, without success. On 1st May the *Narwhal*, while on a minelaying operation, sank the s.s. *Buenos Aires* and damaged the *Bahia Castillo*. All these attacks took place within 30 miles of the Skaw or to the northward. Further west, the French *Orphée* attacked two U-boats about 90 miles south-west of the Naze and claimed one sunk on 21st April.[2]

Three British submarines came to grief in the latter part of April, however—the *Sterlet*, sunk by enemy A/S craft in the East Skagerrak[3] on the 18th ; the *Truant*, damaged by an explosion, possibly a magnetic torpedo, on the 25th, while on passage[3] to Sogne Fjord with Liaison Officers and S.A. ammunition ; and the *Unity*, which accidentally met an Allied convoy in a fog and was rammed and sunk by the Norwegian s.s. *Atlejarl*, in 55° 13′ N., 1° 20′ E.

Off the west coast of Norway, the *Trident* drove aground and badly damaged a 4000-ton merchant vessel[4] on 2nd May in Kors Fjord (Bergen area) after a 10-mile chase in broad daylight, and two days later the *Severn* chased and sank a German prize, the Swedish s.s. *Monark*, on passage from Stavanger to Germany.

A sad incident occured on 5th May, when the *Seal*, which had been laying mines in the Kattegat, was seriously damaged by a mine or depth charge. Attempts to reach Swedish territorial waters off Goteborg failed, and she was captured and towed ignominiously into a German port.

Next day (6th) the *Sealion* attacked two large transports to the southward of Oslo Fjord, and on the 8th the *Taku*, two 3000-ton merchant vessels escorted by torpedo boats west of the Skagerrak ; she was severely hunted, but survived undamaged. Neither of these attacks achieved success, but on 20th May the *Spearfish*, after capturing their crews, sank two Danish fishing vessels to the east of the Dogger Bank, and on the 23rd the *Tetrarch* sank one Danish fishing vessel some 70 miles south of the Naze, and sent another in prize to Leith—a distance of 340 miles.

Minefields were laid by the French *Rubis* on the 10th and 25th May ; by the *Narwhal* on the 1st and 11th, and by the *Porpoise* on 15th May.

30. The Conjunct Expeditions [PLAN 1

The foregoing sections give a brief summary of the principal naval activities during the period of the Allied operations in Norway. It is now proposed to turn to the amphibious expeditions which they were designed to support.

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[1] This decision was taken on 23rd April.

[2] *U.22* was lost in the North Sea in April 1940, due to a cause unknown.

[3] 58° 03′ N., 11° 19′ E.

[4] She was, however, subsequently salved.

From a naval point of view, four main localities were involved in these operations, viz. :—

CENTRAL NORWAY: *OBJECTIVE TRONDHEIM*[1]

Namsos (Operations Henry and Maurice). First landing 14th April: evacuation 2nd May.

Aandalsnes (Operations Primrose and Sickle). First landing 17th April: evacuation 1st May.

NORTHERN NORWAY: *OBJECTIVE NARVIK*[2]

Harstad (Operation Rupert). First landing 14th April: evacuation 8th June.

Bodo area (between the Central and Northern areas). First landing 29th April in an attempt to check German interference at Narvik after the evacuation of the Trondheim area. Evacuated 29th May.

The ensuing chapters follow the fortunes of each of these expeditions in some detail. Both the central and northern campaigns opened with the landings of parties on Norwegian soil on the same day—14th April ; but whereas the former venture was over in under three weeks, the latter dragged on until the capture of Narvik on 28th May and the final evacuation some ten days later. For this reason the campaign in Central Norway will be dealt with first ; but it must be remembered that operations in the Narvik area were being conducted concurrently.

[1] The military forces in the Namsos area were under the command of Maj.-Gen. Carton de Wiart, V.C. ; those in the Aandalsnes area under Maj.-Gen. Paget. Lt.-Gen. Massy was appointed Commander-in-Chief, Forces operating in Central Norway, on 19th April, but he exercised his command from the United Kingdom, as the course of events did not permit of opening a H.Q. in Norway.

[2] The military forces in Northern Norway were commanded by Maj.-Gen. Mackesy till 13th May, when he was superseded by Lt.-Gen. Auchinleck. On 20th April Admiral of the Fleet Lord Cork was appointed in supreme command of all expeditionary forces in this area.

CHAPTER IV

THE LANDINGS AT NAMSOS

31. Operation Henry [PLAN 11

It will be remembered that none of the projected Allied landings was to take place if the Germans were in a position to oppose it (otherwise than from the air) and consequently it was of the utmost importance to forestall the arrival of enemy troops at the chosen places by whatever means were available. This was the reason for Operation Henry—a purely temporary measure designed to ensure that on the arrival of the first flight of troops at Namsos, they would not find it already occupied by Germans.

Vice-Admiral Cunningham had reported Namsos and the adjacent fjords clear of the enemy on 12th April, then proceeding north to rejoin the Commander-in-Chief off the Lofoten Islands, but the troops destined for Namsos could not arrive for some days. Further south, Captain Pegram with the *Glasgow*, *Sheffield* and six destroyers[1] was operating in the Aalesund area ; early on 13th April[2] he was searching for a pocket battleship, a cruiser and many large merchant ships reported by aircraft the previous day, when he intercepted A.T. 0216/13 addressed to the Commander-in-Chief :—

> 'In order to forestall the Germans at Namsos and to ensure an unopposed landing for a larger force, which will arrive at Namsos [about the 16th] propose, if you see no objection, that *Sheffield* and *Glasgow* should each prepare a landing party of about 150 men. A decision as to whether these parties will be required to land should be received by *Glasgow* and *Sheffield* about 1500 today (Saturday). Party should have provisions for seven days. Time of landing will be at the discretion of the Commanding Officer, H.M.S. *Glasgow*. Operation will be called " Henry " '.

The Commander-in-Chief had ' no objection, as a very temporary measure ; but, as both ships' main armaments will be practically out of action for this period, consider it essential R.A.F. bombers should clear up pocket-battleships, cruisers, destroyers, and 15,000-ton storeship in Molde area '. The Admiralty therefore told Captain Pegram to carry on, and A.T. 1627/13 gave him particular instructions (extract) :—

> ' Your object is to secure Namsen Fjord, so that a force of two battalions can be landed, a.m., 17th April. Landing parties should secure quays at Namsos and Bangsund and bridge across River Namsen ; road south from Bangsund to be secured, if possible. Norwegians should be given every encouragement and assistance with rifles and ammunition.
>
> About 4000 German troops in Trondheim area ; outposts reported at Stenkjaer.
>
> Norwegian units reported at Snass (64° 25′ N., 12° 18′ E.) and Verdalsoren area (63° 47′ N., 11° 30′ E.).
>
> Cruisers are to withdraw to the westward when fjord has been secured. Daily contact is to be made with landing party by destroyer '.

Captain Pegram prepared to land his party at dawn on the 14th, shifting the men into two destroyers off Kroken, on the east shore in the widest part of Namsen Fjord, a dozen miles short of Namsos, where the cruisers would wait. Captain Nicholson with the 6th Flotilla would then conduct the landing at Namsos, while the three ships of the 4th Flotilla covered the mouth of the

[1] *Somali, Mashona, Matabele* (of 6th Flotilla), *Afridi, Sikh, Mohawk* (of 4th Flotilla).

[2] *See* Sec. 19 *ante*.

fjord. But Captain Pegram had sent all six destroyers to Aalesund ' to mop up the many large merchant vessels ' (which turned out to be Norwegian) ; once there they stayed all the 13th, the Senior Officer, Captain Nicholson, being impressed with the importance of that neighbourhood, on which the local authorities insisted, and expecting that the landing might be diverted there from Namsos. 'Admiral Tank-Nielson ', he reported ' considers Romsdals Fjord the most strategic point on the west coast ; main importance lies in position of railway and road and the existence of ammunition stocks at Molde '. Captain Pegram therefore decided to land in the evening, despite the greater risk from the air ; but for a time this danger made him hesitate, presumably on hearing of the destroyers' experiences on the 13th, when a score of German aircraft bombed them during their visit to Aalesund and Molde. Although the destroyers drove off the enemy with the loss of three machines, and without injury to themselves, the strength of the attack showed that ships would run considerable danger in the fjords.

The party landed from the destroyers ' without difficulty ' at dusk on the 14th, ' although,' said Captain Pegram, ' I am certain our presence was known to the enemy ' through reconnaissance aircraft. About 350 seamen and marines landed under Captain Edds, R.M., of the *Sheffield*. They took with them demolition gear to destroy the wharves and bridges in case of need, and extra rifles and cartridges to supply the wants of their Norwegian allies. A staff officer of the main expedition had arrived in the afternoon, flying to Norway ahead of his general ; and, in consultation with him, it was decided to send the *Glasgow*'s party to Bangsund, and to take post south of it, while the *Sheffield*'s landed at Namsos and took post to the eastward. The British staff officer and the Norwegian officers saw no difficulty in ' Henry's ' holding its own for a time, but they did not feel sanguine about future movements : snow covered the district ; Namsos and Bangsund were small, they gave little concealment, and they were short of fresh water ; ' the southward move of any force much larger than one battalion must be both slow and conspicuous from the air '.

After landing ' Henry ', Captain Nicholson stayed at Namsos in the *Somali* to arrange for the landing of ' Maurice ' and to meet its commander, General Carton de Wiart, who arrived in a flying boat on the 15th. The other two ships of the 6th Flotilla went out to meet and assist the troopship convoy on its arrival. Captain Pegram, with the *Glasgow*, *Sheffield* and the three destroyers of the 4th Flotilla (two of which had oiled from the cruisers under way in Namsen Fjord) went out also to cruise in the offing near Kya Light, and afterwards to join Admiral Layton, who was bringing over the British troops of ' Maurice ' and expected to reach Namsen Fjord by dusk on the 15th. The discouraging report from the army officers, quoted above, decided the Government to hold up the landing, however, and the first troops did not land until the following night. ' Henry's ' task then ending, the *Sikh* and *Matabele*, after landing some troops of ' Maurice ', brought off the naval parties from Namsos and Bangsund, and carried them to their proper ships early on the 17th.

32. Operation Maurice : First landings, 16th–17th April [PLAN 11

Under the original plan, as mentioned previously,[1] Vice-Admiral Edward-Collins was to have conducted the naval side of this expedition, the first flight of which then consisted of two battalions under Brigadier Morgan, embarked in the cruisers *Galatea* and *Arethusa* and the transport *Orion*. These were to have arrived at Namsos on 17th April, followed a few days later by a full

[1] *See* Sec. 19 *ante*.

brigade, with wagons, stores, ammunition and petrol embarked in transports. Admiral Whitworth's victory at Narvik on the 13th, however, produced a wave of optimism as to the task of the northern expedition and in the evening of the 14th the Government diverted to Namsos one of the two brigades then on passage to Narvik under Admiral Layton ' because expected opposition at the latter place had been considerably reduced by naval action '.

That evening Admiral Layton's convoy divided, he himself in the *Manchester*, with the *Birmingham*, *Cairo* and three destroyers, and two transports, the *Empress of Australia* and *Chrobry*, carrying the 146th Brigade (battalions of the Lincolnshire, the King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry and the York and Lancaster regiments) steering for Namsos, while the remainder of the convoy escorted by the *Valiant* and nine destroyers continued for Narvik.[1] This detachment then became the first flight for Central Norway.

On the 15th, however, the account of conditions in and about Namsos led the Government to put off the landing and to order the convoy to go to Lillesjona, more than 100 miles farther north. They gave the last order probably on receiving a signal from Captain Nicholson, who reported ' facilities for landing and accommodation of large numbers of troops at Namsos very inadequate . . . impossible to deal with more than one transport at anchor at a time . . . very grave risk to town and transports unless command of air is certain '. On the other hand, he said, ' If transports could be sent elsewhere, destroyers could embark troops and land them at Namsos and Bangsund. . . . This would enable troops to be dispersed by rail from Namsos and by road from Bangsund. All disembarkation of troops should take place at dusk, and might be continued well into the night, provided weather is clear '. The following signal gave the new arrangements—A.T. 1722/15, addressed to Admiral Layton :—

> ' General Carton de Wiart will probably join you Lillesjona. Subject to what Carton de Wiart may report after visiting Namsos, it is probable that a decision will be given that troops should be transferred to destroyers at Lillesjona and proceed in destroyers to Namsos, taking as much stores with them as possible. It is hoped that, after discussion with General, you will be able to land first flight at Namsos tomorrow, Tuesday, at dusk. Early arrival is of first importance from political point of view '.

Admiral Layton welcomed the change of plan. To begin with, the size of the transports caused embarrassment, especially the *Empress of Australia*, which had in-turning screws ; he had already arranged to send the troops on board destroyers in Namsen Fjord, but Lillesjona was clearly to be preferred. Then the *Cairo* and the old destroyers with him were running short of oil, which the Admiralty provided for by diverting to Lillesjona the oiler *War Pindari*, on her way to Tromsö. Lastly, like everybody else, Admiral Layton felt anxious about the danger from the air. Under the original plan for the landing, there had been two anti-aircraft ships told off to protect the troopships. Now there was only the *Cairo ;* the Admiralty had ordered the *Curlew* to join the convoy, but bad weather delayed her, which was unlucky, said Admiral Layton, ' as it appeared that every possible anti-aircraft protection would be needed '. The convoy kept out at sea until dark on the 15th to avoid being shadowed from the air, and anchored in Lillesjona early on the 16th. Four of Captain Pegram's destroyers joined on the way to the anchorage. The *War Pindari* arrived in the forenoon and oiled the destroyers before they took the troops from the transports. Later still, General Carton de Wiart arrived in the *Somali* from Namsos, which place he had reached by air the day before. In the evening the *Curlew* arrived ; and the *War Pindari* sailed for Tromsö, having finished

[1] *See* Secs. 19 and 21 *ante*.

her task for Admiral Layton, but left behind one of her escorting destroyers, the *Nubian*, that the *Somali* might go home for ammunition, which she had run out of the day before in encounters with German aircraft.[1]

The influence of the air appears also in messages the General sent the War Office during the night (15th–16th). In the first, after giving his first thoughts about landing the troops, he emphasized 'the difficulties presented by enemy air activity, whereas we have no planes at all'. In the second, 0126/16, he says:—

> 'Concealment of troops by day is very difficult. There is little cover and still a great deal of snow. However, if it is essential to advance, the sooner it is done the better.
>
> I cannot at present judge situation at Trondheim; but it will be essential that strong action should be taken as regards enemy air activity when I attack. If there is to be naval attack at Trondheim, and it is successful, General Audet should attack as soon as possible after it. If you could inform me of date of this attack, it would help decide definite date of my attack. My orders to General Audet would be to attack if naval operations succeeded. If you could ensure his having close liaison with Navy, this would be possible'.[2]

He had already sent the commander of the 146th Brigade his first thoughts about a landing. While held up by weather on his way across the North Sea, thinking the troops would land at Namsos on the 15th, he said they should take their stand covering Henry, the naval party, and make ready to advance at short notice towards Trondheim. While going from Namsos to join the brigade, he said he proposed landing two battalions from destroyers during the night 16th–17th: two companies to land at Bangsund, the rest at Namsos, and the destroyers should be ready to leave Lillesjona at noon. This plan was carried out, though a couple of hours late, during an attack from the air. The *Afridi*, *Nubian*, *Sikh*, *Matabele* and *Mashona* went alongside the transports as they finished oiling and took on board the two battalions, while the Germans dropped bombs in the anchorage, narrowly missing the two transports and the *War Pindari*, each of which had destroyers alongside during the attack. They sailed in the afternoon, the Lincolnshire and half the York and Lancaster going to Namsos, the other two companies of the York and Lancaster to Bangsund. The General went in with his men, making his headquarters on board the *Afridi*, and from her he reported thus to the War Office a little before midnight:

> 'Have brought 1000 men to Namsos today, and hope to bring remainder of Phillips's brigade tomorrow . . . Am occupying Grong, Bangsund and probably positions astride Beitstad Fjord, 25 miles south of Namsos. No fresh information of the enemy. Enemy aircraft still bombing at leisure'.

The King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry should have landed from destroyers next day, the transport *Chrobry* going in at the same time with all the stores of the brigade. But, said Admiral Layton,

> 'when it became clear the air attacks were persisting, I had to review the plans made with the General. It was true that air attacks were not so far on a very large scale, though practically continuous; but I could see no reason why they should not increase, and continue at short intervals; and it was impossible to ignore the risk of a disastrous hit on a liner full of troops. I was confirmed in my opinion by a visit I paid to the troopships in the course of the afternoon, when it became clear to me that the morale of the young and untried soldiers was likely to suffer if they were subjected to prolonged attacks of this kind while still embarked.

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[1] The *Somali* was attacked three times at Namsos on 15th April and had 60 bombs aimed at her without effect, but she spent all her ammunition and at the end fired practice ammunition 'for moral effect'.

[2] The first troops of General Audet's command reached Namsos in the night, 19th–20th.

I therefore decided that it would be necessary to leave the anchorage before daylight the next morning. This made it impossible to use the destroyers as arranged. Accordingly, I decided to move the third battalion from the *Empress of Australia* to the *Chrobry*, and send the latter in alone to Namsos'.

The soldiers and all but 170 tons of the stores having been shifted into the *Chrobry*, the convoy sailed about 0330 on the 17th, and stood out to sea for the day. The *Highlander* had run on shore in the night, while patrolling outside Lillesjona, and she had to go home, leaving only the *Vanoc* and *Whirlwind* for a screen, but before she actually parted company she forced a German submarine to dive, some distance ahead, and thus enabled the convoy to avoid attack. About 1000 the screen gained strength by the return of the ships that had landed the first battalions, General Carton de Wiart returning with them in the *Afridi*. Later still in the forenoon, with the General agreeing, Admiral Layton sent home the *Empress of Australia*, escorted by the *Birmingham* and two old destroyers. ' There seemed no alternative ', says the Admiral, ' to letting the 170 tons of stores still in her go back to the United Kingdom and be shipped back in a smaller vessel, and the sooner this was done the better '. The rest of the convoy turned back in time to reach Namsen Fjord at sunset, about 1945. There the *Chrobry* parted company for Namsos, with the *Curlew* and the five ' Tribals ' for escort, while the Admiral, in the *Manchester*, went out to sea again for the night, and the *Cairo* went north to Skjel Fjord for oil. The soldiers landed during the night without interruption from the enemy ; but at 0200, the 18th, ' the military working parties were withdrawn, presumably in order to take cover before daylight : this cessation left 130 tons of stores still on board the *Chrobry*, and the G.O.C. agreed to these remaining '. All the ships returned to the Admiral in 65° N., 7° 50′ E., at noon.

33. Naval movements and landing of French, 17th-20th April [PLAN 11

Ever since landing their parties for ' Henry ', the *Glasgow* and *Sheffield* had been cruising off the coast. Captain Pegram had sent his destroyers to join Admiral Layton at Lillesjona, when the signals showed him that they would be needed to land ' Maurice ', but he kept his cruisers away from the land, lest their presence near Namsos should arouse suspicion in the enemy. He went back to Namsen Fjord early on the 17th to take on board his landing parties ; and, having no further orders, he then stretched away to the southward to help the *York*, which, with the *Effingham*, *Calcutta* and *Ashanti*, was searching for five German destroyers, reported by aircraft off Stavanger the evening before and perhaps trying to land a force at Aandalsnes. The *York* and her consorts finding nothing, Captain Pegram turned north again in the afternoon, and later received a signal from the Admiralty telling him to go to Namsen Fjord to give anti-aircraft protection for the *Chrobry*'s landing, and to oil the *Mashona* and *Nubian*, after which the *Glasgow* and *Sheffield* were to go to Scapa. The two cruisers gave some 200 tons of oil each to the *Mashona* and *Nubian* in Namsen Fjord during the night, joined the Admiral outside next day, and then went to Scapa to get oil themselves, arriving there on the 19th.

Admiral Layton's service on that part of the coast was ending, too. The next troops for ' Maurice ' were French. General Audet was bringing the first three battalions of his chasseurs-alpins in four troopships, escorted by the French Admiral with the *Emile Bertin* and some French destroyers. They should have arrived on the 18th, but were a day late, so Admiral Layton took the opportunity to send in the *Chrobry* again to land the last of her stores in the evening of the 18th, and she went home next day with a cargo of timber from

Namsos. Meanwhile, Sir Charles Forbes ordered home nearly all the British ships to prepare for the intended landing at Trondheim (Operation Hammer). Accordingly Admiral Layton steered towards Rosyth on the 19th, and made ready the *Manchester* for taking troops and stores on board. The *Matabele* had gone home for oil on the 18th, the *Sikh* and *Mashona* took the *Chrobry* home, the *Afridi* and *Nubian* started for home after landing General Carton de Wiart and some Norwegian pilots they had collected to meet the French. This left the *Cairo* only, for the *Curlew* had to go home, too, for oil ; and Admiral Layton ' viewed this position with some anxiety, especially as the next convoy was to be the first French one and in view of the growing probability of submarines operating off the entrance to Namsen Fjord '. Evidently Sir Charles Forbes saw things in the same light, for he ordered the *Manchester* to go back, but she had run 400 miles to the southward on her way home and could not get back in time ' for the first and critical French landing ', so Admiral Layton ' adjusted course and speed with a view to meeting the convoy on its return journey '.

Fortunately the *Cairo* was still on the spot and she led the French convoy in to Namsos. German aircraft attacked it during its passage through the fjords in the evening of 19th April, as they had attacked the British part of ' Maurice ' at Lillesjona. They hit the *Emile Bertin*, flagship of Admiral Derrien, early in the attack, about 1800, and she went home.[1] The *Cairo* and the French destroyers took the troopships to Namsos : *El d'Jezair* (Admiral Cadart), *El Mansour*, *El Kantara*, each of 5,000–6,000 tons, and the *Ville d'Oran*, above 10,000 tons. They had no further casualty, though the last-named transport was slightly damaged. The troops landed in the night with all but a few tons of ammunition and stores, and the convoy went home, escorted by the *Cairo*, being joined by the *Manchester* in the evening of the 20th, which remained in company till off the Shetlands next day and then proceeded to Scapa.

34. German air attacks on Namsos

A few hours after the ships had gone on the 20th, German aircraft attacked Namsos itself, there being no defence. The *Nubian* came back that night, and Commander Ravenhill says : ' The whole place was a mass of flames from end to end, and the glare on the snows of the surrounding mountains produced an unforgettable spectacle '. General Carton de Wiart came on board to say that ' the storehouses on the jetties had been destroyed and that, owing to the evacuation of the Norwegians, all his transport had disappeared ; in consequence, any stores landed would be exposed to almost certain destruction before there was any hope of removing them, even troops might not be got to safety in time . . . unless the Germans could be drastically restricted in their air activities within a very short time, the expedition was doomed '. And early on the 21st the General thus reported the state of affairs to the War Office :—

> ' Enemy aircraft have almost completely destroyed Namsos, beginning on railhead target, diving indiscriminately. At present impossible to land more men or material. If I am to continue operations, it seems that I must largely depend on road-borne supplies, either through Mosjoen (150 miles away by road) or from Sweden . . . . Acute shortage of cars and petrol here. I see little chance of carrying out decisive or, indeed, any operations, unless enemy air activity is considerably restricted. Audet wishes Gamelin informed of situation. Phillips's brigade at present Verdal, Stenkjaer, Foldafoss. French take over around Namsos.'

[1] The *Montcalm* took the place of the *Emile Bertin* in the Home Fleet.

There were more attacks from the air on the 21st, though less harmful than the day before. The *Auckland* sloop, coming in the afternoon to relieve the *Nubian*, was attacked with bombs and machine-gun fire throughout her passage up Namsen Fjord. The following remarks in Commander Ravenhill's letter of proceedings, written as the *Nubian* went back to Scapa, describe an experience common to all small ships employed at the expeditionary bases :—

> ' Just before my departure (on the 22nd), a French naval officer came on board and expressed the gratification of the French General at the effect the presence of the ships had had in curtailing enemy air activity. He asked me to press very strongly for the continued presence of the ships. Personally, I doubt whether the presence of so small a force of ships does stop the enemy making raids : the gunfire certainly makes the bombing wilder, and has the effect of easing pressure tremendously on the land forces, as the enemy appear to go exclusively for the ships when there are any present. I was not surprised when I heard a severe raid had taken place in the evening after my departure, and I don't suppose my presence would have averted it.
>
> A very great strain is imposed on the personnel of these A.A. ships when employed on this type of duty. Owing to the high mountains, no warning can be obtained of the approach of hostile aircraft ; and in ships whose entire armament is manned for A.A. fire it is essential to be in at least the second degree of readiness during daylight hours from about 0300 to 2100. Reversion to third degree of readiness during the six hours of darkness does not provide much relaxation. The ships are continually underway, day and night, and when the attacks come there is little room to manoeuvre. There is continued tension, and the knowledge that before the day is over there is almost certain to be at least one severe attack and that nothing can come to your assistance is trying to the nerves.
>
> I am not trying to pretend that *Nubian* has performed any arduous duty, as we had a very short period under these conditions, but enough to realise what it might be like for any length of time.
>
> If ships have to be used for A.A. defence of a port which lies so close to an enemy air base as does Namsos, I submit that at least three ships are necessary to be effective, and they will have to be carefully disposed, so as to obtain freedom of manœuvre in the restricted waters without getting in each other's way.'

35. Final Reinforcements, Namsos [PLAN 11

In the meantime, the next body of French troops had sailed from Scapa in the 10,000-ton transport *Ville d'Alger*, escorted by the *Calcutta* and a couple of French destroyers, to which Admiral Layton added the *Birmingham* for the latter part of the passage across the North Sea. They were to arrive on the 21st, but as things stood the General would not let them land, so the transport, arriving before they could stop her, was ordered to sea again. The *Calcutta* brought her in next day, 22nd, and a storeship came the same evening. The storeship went alongside to unload ; but the big Frenchman could not manage it, so she had to anchor, the troops going on shore in the *Auckland* and a destroyer, and she sailed again without landing her heavy stores, among them some anti-tank guns and an anti-aircraft battery.

No more infantry landed at Namsos. General Carton de Wiart had mentioned the possibility of having to withdraw as early as the 21st, as follows (*Nubian's* 2335/21) :—

> ' Phillips's brigade attacked by enemy landed from cruiser and torpedo boat early this morning, 21st April : our troops being pressed, but situation not yet clear. Am endeavouring to push up French troops ; but lorries promised by Norway staff have not yet materialized. Enemy aircraft again very active and dominating situation.

Fear our position becomes untenable, for although jetties not destroyed, approaches very difficult, owing to debris and craters. Only three small storehouses standing, so no room to hide stores. Railhead damaged. No labour available. All civilians left Namsos. No cars left.

Should you decide on evacuating, send ships not larger than 5,000 tons maximum and fear it requires two nights to embark '.[1]

The German troops mentioned had artillery, and landed at Stenkjaer, which ships could reach through narrow fjords from Trondheim. Next day a German destroyer shelled the troops at Verdalsoren, some 15 miles farther south. And on the 23rd the General signalled again that he feared ' there is no alternative to evacuation ' unless he could have superiority in the air. In these circumstances, the next convoy of chasseurs-alpins joined the Narvik expedition instead. On the other hand, guns and stores were landed at Namsos on 27th and 28th April, including those the *Ville d'Alger* had carried home again and another battery of anti-aircraft guns and a battery of howitzers manned by the Royal Marines.

[1] It is interesting to notice that the Germans, who were not fully aware of the effect of their air attacks or of the weakness in numbers and equipment of the Allied troops in Central Norway, regarded the situation in the Trondheim area as much more serious from their point of view than it actually was. Thus it came about that on 21st April, just when General Carton de Wiart was describing his position as ' untenable,' Hitler was informing the Naval Staff that he had decided to use fast liners, including the *Bremen* and *Europa*, to carry reinforcements to Trondheim. This plan was dropped, as the result of representations by the Naval Staff that it could not guarantee safe passage ; but that it should have been put forward is a measure of the anxiety the Germans were feeling at the time.

CHAPTER V

THE LANDINGS AT AANDALSNES, AALESUND AND MOLDE

36. Operation Primrose [PLANS 1, 11

While the expedition to Namsos was fizzling out to its inevitable conclusion the Aandalsnes venture was having little better fortune.

The original intention was to occupy Aalesund, half-way between Bud and the peninsula of Stadtlandet, ' with the object of neutralizing ' the Indreled on that part of the coast and to ' create a diversion ' south of Trondheim, while troops were landing at Namsos, north of that place. This operation received the code name of ' Primrose ', and was to be carried out by marines and seamen drawn from certain ships of the Home Fleet then in dockyard hands. Meanwhile, however, the Norwegians made known their anxiety for Romsdals Fjord, where they feared a German attack, and which Admiral Tank-Neilsen called ' the most strategic point on the west coast '. This fjord is some 40 miles north and east of Aalesund and farther inland. Near its mouth, actually outside the fjord proper, lies Molde, which has a little harbour like Aalesund; at the inland end of the fjord is Aandalsnes, from which the railway runs south through Dombaas, 60 miles away, and through Lillehammer to Oslo, a branch line from Dombaas running back northward to Trondheim, distant about 100 miles from Dombaas. The Norwegian Army had its general headquarters at Lillehammer, while a column of troops some 2000 strong lay between Aandalsnes and Dombaas, and there were stocks of munitions at Molde. For these reasons, presumably, and to make ready for the enveloping attack on Trondheim from north and south, the British Government changed the destination of ' Primrose ' to Aandalsnes.

The parties had begun to make ready two days before the expedition was decided on, in compliance with A.T. 1209 of the 11th, addressed to the *Hood*, *Nelson* and *Barham*, which ran as follows : ' Marine detachments of 100 men from each ship and seamen field gun's crews may be required for a special operation to occupy small islands for limited period shortly ; parties would be required to be self-supporting for one month, and to land and mount 12-pdr. gun or 3·7-in. howitzer ; necessary preliminary preparations to be made '. Orders next day increased each party by 70 men ; and on the 13th came orders for the 21st Light Anti-aircraft Battery, Royal Marines, and two detachments of the 11th Searchlight Regiment, Royal Marines, to join the expedition. On the same day Lieutenant-Colonel Simpson, R.M., was appointed in command of the force, which was to be transported to Norway in the sloops *Black Swan*, *Flamingo*, *Auckland* and *Bittern*. Some 45 officers and 680 men actually sailed, with three 3·7-in. howitzers and eight anti-aircraft pom-poms for the field force, and two 4-in. guns for Aalesund ; but the searchlights stayed behind.

Colonel Simpson came to Rosyth in the morning of the 14th, and the rest of the expedition arrived during the day. The *Barham*'s party arrived first from Liverpool, then the *Hood*'s from Plymouth, the anti-aircraft battery from Tynemouth, the *Nelson*'s from Portsmouth, and last, a little before midnight, the searchlight detachments from Yeovil. Men and gear went on board the sloops as they arrived, for the expedition had orders to sail the same day, so

had not time for ' any pre-arranged and useful order ' of stowage. For instance, the seamen and marines from the *Nelson* sailed in different ships, to make room for the anti-aircraft guns to sail in two ships also and avoid the risk of having all in one basket, but the *Nelson*'s had not expected nor prepared for this when loading their train. Although Captain Poland of the *Black Swan* spared the greater part of one month's supply of victuals for the expedition from the three months' outfit in his flotilla, that the force might use the space thus saved for essential equipment instead of the victuals they had brought with them, they had still to go without some of their stores ; among other things there was no room for the searchlights. As it was, the ships drew a foot more water than their normal draught, and had to stow much heavy gear on their upper decks, besides carrying an extra number of men equal to their own crews, ' most unfavourable ' weather forecasts notwithstanding. ' It is for consideration ', wrote Colonel Simpson afterwards, ' whether, in similar circumstances, a delay of some hours in sailing is not justifiable in order to allow a reasonable loading plan '.

The *Auckland* did sail that evening, with the *Barham*'s party and one of the 4-in. guns, that she might gain a footing at Aalesund betimes and keep pace with the Namsos expedition, whose first troops were also embarking at Rosyth that day. Owing to the late arrival of the rest of the force, the other three ships could not sail until 0330 on the 15th. But they soon overtook the *Auckland*. She had met with a gale of wind in the night, and finding he could not keep the speed required to arrive by dawn on the 16th, Commander Hewitt decided to wait for his consorts. They joined him off Buchan Ness, and steered away for Invergordon soon afterwards to shelter. The sea was rising, the ships could barely steam 10 knots, their crowded passengers were sea-sick. ' It would not have been possible to arrive at our destination at or near dawn on the desired day ', said Captain Poland in his subsequent report, ' and ' Primrose ' would also have been a very wilted flower by the time it arrived '. At Invergordon they received A.T. 1926/15, which changed their destination to Aandalsnes :—

> ' Inform Lieut.-Colonel Simpson that . . . force is now to proceed to Aandalsnes, which is understood to be in Norwegian hands. If Germans are in Aandalsnes, no landing is to be made, and situation reported. It is possible that other military forces will be landed later at Aandalsnes . . . .'

The gale which forced them in to Invergordon gave Colonel Simpson time and opportunity at last to meet his officers and to explain his plans for the landing and for future service, though there was not much he could do before the expedition arrived, as he lacked maps and knew little of the country he was bound for, the NORWAY PILOT being his only source of knowledge.

The wind and sea abating, the expedition set out again on the 16th. During the passage, two further signals affecting the operation were sent. A.T. 1633 of the 16th ordered 1000 soldiers, under Brigadier Morgan, to follow as soon as possible ; and A.T. 1507/17 told Colonel Simpson to mount his 4-in. guns at Aalesund and to land men to hold that place as well as Aandalsnes.

The force arrived at Aandalsnes at 2200 on the 17th ; and the *Black Swan* went alongside the quay to unload, with the *Bittern* outside her, while the other two ships patrolled in the fjord. When the *Black Swan* finished the *Bittern* took her place, the *Flamingo* going alongside her in turn, and so they proceeded. All had finished by 0700 on the 18th, much helped by the use of a 5-ton travelling crane on the quay—an unexpected resource—and unmolested by the enemy, though they had sighted and fired on a German aircraft a few

hours before they arrived. Then the *Auckland* and *Bittern* put to sea again to take the *Barham*'s party and the 4-in. guns to Aalesund, and another party went to Molde, to form a base there, with Captain Denny as Naval Officer-in-Charge. Thus the expedition had an easy passage, apart from the weather, and it landed without hindrance. Yet there had been reason for anxiety in reports on the 16th that Germans from seaplanes might forestall ' Primrose ' and that German destroyers had been seen off Stavanger. On receiving the first report, Captain Poland made up his mind to disregard his routeing orders and to go direct from Fair Island to his destination, chancing discovery from the air as he steered along the Norwegian coast, instead of standing farther north before crossing the North Sea.

German aircraft bombed Aandalsnes nearly every day from the 20th onwards. The attacks grew worse, so all the work of the base was done at night, the men taking shelter in the woods and on the hillsides during the raids. In the end the Germans destroyed the town, most of which was built of wood, but the marines' anti-aircraft gunners claim to have protected the railway and the quay successfully. The *Hood*'s field howitzer went into action against some German parachute troops between Dombaas and Dovre the day after landing, and helped the Norwegians in rounding them up. Otherwise, ' Primrose ' encountered enemy land forces only on the last day of the expedition, when a few marines at an outpost beyond Verma covered the retreat from that place. For the rest, ' Primrose ' became part of ' Sickle ' when the latter expedition arrived. Brigadier Morgan sent his first battalions forward to Dombaas and beyond, as soon as he could learn the state of affairs, leaving only light anti-aircraft guns at Aandalsnes. ' He relied upon me ', said Colonel Simpson, ' to hold the Aandalsnes area with its vital railhead and landing place ', and this remained the principal object of the naval party. Colonel Simpson had made his own arrangements with this in view at his landing. The marines established ' six platoon posts, with one in reserve, covering important tactical positions such as road bridges, the electrical power station at Verma, about 28 miles inland, and possible lines of enemy approach, as well as the aerodrome at Lesjaswick (Lake Lesjaskog—' Gladiator Lake '), about 40 miles inland. Some positions were changed as the situation altered, but the functions of the detachments remained the same '. The anti-aircraft pom-poms were posted at various points about the town. The seamen served mainly as a working party at the base. Captain Denny wrote from Molde ; ' It is fortunate that the first party to be landed was a seaman and Royal Marines' force and that this party largely remained in the vicinity of Aandalsnes ; the unavoidable absence of any proper base personnel and equipment in the earlier stages of the expedition produced a local situation which, in my opinion, was only mastered through the adaptability to be expected of naval units '.[1]

As for Aalesund, its party arrived there in the afternoon of 18th April. The Norwegians received the party with enthusiasm, all but its 4-in. guns, which they held would invite attack from the air, and against that they had no defence. The local Norwegian commander thought the guns unnecessary for controlling the Indreled, since dangerous areas had been declared off Bud and Stadtlandet on the 8th, nor did he expect attack by sea now that Aandalsnes was occupied. On his behalf Commander Hewitt of the *Auckland* asked for two 3-in. high-angle guns, and ' strongly recommended ' taking away the coast defence weapons, unless some sort of anti-aircraft guns could be provided

[1] Captain Denny added : ' This force, it must be remembered, was ashore throughout the period of the operation, and consequently were exposed for the longest period to the effects of air bombardment ; in general, they behaved like seasoned veterans.'

for the port. In the meantime, Major Lumley, of the *Hood*, whom Colonel Simpson had placed in command at Aalesund, set about digging the gun-pits, though he had leave to put off mounting the guns, which in fact were never mounted. Apart from the objection to having the guns at all, Major Lumley found they lacked several essential articles of equipment. It was the same with the 3-in. high-angle guns, when they came on the 23rd ; ' many essential items had been omitted '. One or two transports coaled at Aalesund before going home after landing men or gear at Aandalsnes, but little else happened there during the stay of the British party except the almost daily attacks from the air.

37. Operation Sickle [PLAN 11

Meanwhile, before the ' Primrose ' force had even reached Aandalsnes, the decision had been taken to increase the scale of operations in this area, and preliminary orders issued for Operation Sickle. The first hint of this operation came on 16th April and was contained in a message from the C.I.G.S. to General Carton de Wiart (A.T. 0020/16)[1] which stated that the naval party would be reinforced, if possible, but that the only troops immediately available were those under Brigadier Morgan's command. These consisted of two weak territorial battalions, the 5th Leicestershire and the 8th Sherwood Foresters, with four Bofors anti-aircraft guns, hitherto destined for Namsos.

Later that day orders were sent to Vice-Admiral Edward-Collins, who conducted the first flight of the expedition, and to Brigadier Morgan. Those to the Admiral (A.T. 1633/16) ran as follows :—

> ' It has been decided to land a military force at Aandalsnes as soon as possible, in addition to ' Primrose ' force. *Galatea, Arethusa, Carlisle, Curacoa* and two destroyers are placed under your command, and a total of approximately 1000 troops under Brigadier Morgan are to be embarked in these ships. Forces to sail as soon as ready. Cruisers can go alongside at Molde, and it is recommended that troops from cruisers should be disembarked at that place, being subsequently ferried to Aandalsnes . . . It is of great importance to get troops out of ships as soon as possible on account of air attack . . . Your action on arrival must depend on situation ; unless immediate action is essential, a landing at dusk is considered advisable on account of air attack.'

Brigadier Morgan's instructions followed in A.T. 2014/16 :—

> ' Your role to land Aandalsnes area, secure Dombaas, then operate northwards and take offensive action against Germans in Trondheim area. Not intended that you should land in face of opposition. Second echelon your force will follow you two days later. As you are without transport, you should rely on Norwegian rolling stock and locally impressed transport. You will be kept informed of progress and timings of other British forces operating Trondheim area.
>
> Your force independent command under War Office until receipt further orders. Intention later place you under commander general operations Trondheim area.
>
> During the voyage and during landing operations, senior naval officer will be in command. He will decide, in co-operation with you, where and when to land.'

And in A.T. 2217 of the 17th :—

> ' Denial to Germans of use of railway through Dombaas northward becomes vital. Indications point to improbability of your encountering serious German opposition between Aandalsnes and Dombaas, if you move quickly. Consider full possibility of pushing even small detachments on to Dombaas really rapidly, and act as you judge best. When you have secured Dombaas, you are to prevent Germans using railway to reinforce Trondheim. Am sending small demolition party . . . You should make touch with Norwegian G.H.Q., believed to be in area Lillehammer, and avoid isolating Norwegian forces operating towards Oslo.'

[1] *See* Sec. 22 *ante*.

Most of the troops and stores had to shift from the transport *Orion*, on board of which they had been under the earlier arrangements for Namsos ; and the work, says Admiral Edward-Collins, was ' much hampered by the impossibility of berthing a cruiser directly under the derricks of the *Orion* and the fact that the stores had been loaded as received, and those required were generally at the bottom of the holds '. However, the expedition sailed from Rosyth early on 17th April in the cruisers and anti-aircraft ships named in the orders and in the *Arrow* and *Acheron*. In the evening of the 18th they found the *York* outside Buddybet, the northern approach to Molde and Aandalsnes, where she was cruising to protect the expeditions' arrival ; the Admiral released her from her watch, likewise the *Effingham*, which was covering the southern approach. Inside the fjords were the *Black Swan*, *Flamingo* and *Bittern* sloops : German aircraft had attacked these ships in the afternoon, but ' Sickle ' arrived and landed without interference. The Admiral had learnt from the *Black Swan* that cruisers could go alongside at Aandalsnes, so he left the *Curacoa* and *Arethusa* to land at Molde, and took the rest of the expedition to Aandalsnes, arriving between 2000 and 2100, the 18th. The *Galatea* went alongside at once, the two destroyers taking turns to go alongside her to land their troops and to receive fuel from her ; then the *Carlisle* took the *Galatea's* place, and at 0300 on the 19th the ships sailed. At Molde, of course, the work was finished earlier ; local craft collected by Captain Denny (Naval Officer-in-Charge) ferried the troops and stores thence to Aandalsnes, some arriving before the Admiral left. The *Galatea* and *Arethusa* arrived back at Rosyth without incident on 20th April.

The landing at Aandalsnes, said the Admiral ' was completed more rapidly than I had expected . . . a 5-ton travelling crane on the quay was of great assistance in expediting the unloading of stores '. He went on :—

> ' It is my belief that operation ' Sickle ' was carried out without the knowledge of the enemy, and that this was probably due to the absence of any troop transport with the force, from which aircraft could deduce its object.[1]
>
> In spite of sea-sickness and the general discomfort of the voyage, all the troops landed in good order ; and by 0100 an advance party had entrained and left for Dombaas Junction, which there appeared to be every prospect they would reach without opposition. I consider this a very creditable performance on the part of the ships and troops concerned. I consider the facilities at Aandalsnes excellent for the landing of a small force ; but it is most desirable that adequate shore air defence be provided at the earliest possible moment to prevent damage to the quay and railway station, which are the great assets of the place. The quay, though good, is very short, and there is only one crane ; one large well-aimed bomb would wreck both.'

In the evening of the 19th, the *Carlisle* (Flag, Rear-Admiral Vivian) turned back on her way home, and relieved the *Black Swan* as Senior Naval Officer at Aandalsnes, taking the place of the ' Primrose ' sloops as anti-aircraft guardship. Admiral Vivian's experience and that of his successor, Captain Aylmer in the *Curacoa*, proved the wisdom of landing the troops at night. German aircraft that appeared on the 19th after the troopships had sailed did not drop bombs, perhaps owing to the good shooting of the *Black Swan ;* but bombing attacks greeted the *Carlisle* within three hours of her coming on the 20th, and continued all day. The *Curacoa* arrived on the 22nd to find full employment up to the evening of the 24th, when she was hit and had to go home. Here is Captain Aylmer's account of affairs in a signal made a few hours before his ship was disabled :—

> ' Aandalsnes and *Curacoa* have been repeatedly bombed each day : high, low, and dive bombing attacks, and machine-gunned in the fjord. During daylight

[1] This has been confirmed from German sources.

hours hostile aircraft are never absent from the sky. Attacks usually well pressed home. Some damage to town ; many near misses on *Curacoa*. In dive bombing, bombs appear set delay approximately 12 seconds and burst deep ; this undoubtedly saved *Curacoa's* stern from serious damage. Hits on ship must be expected while doing anti-aircraft guardship. Personnel continuously closed up at action stations and getting no rest. Services of friendly aircraft in this area urgently required and will be most welcome. Reliable sources give seven hostile aircraft brought down by anti-aircraft fire and others damaged. *Curacoa* running short 4-in. ammunition : am drawing from small stock ashore, when fuzed.'

Enemy aircraft constantly attacked Aalesund, too, particularly when ships lay there, but Molde came off lightly until the last few days of the expedition. The letters of proceedings discuss various methods of coping with the attacks. All commanding officers agreed that ships must keep underway during daylight, with good speed at command. The high ground bordering the narrow fjords made gunfire difficult—generally a case of ' snap shoots ' as Captain Poland of the *Black Swan* had it—and radio direction finding was no help in these conditions. All paid tribute to the steadiness and spirit of the men in long periods of constant duty. One officer mentioned the ' tremendously heartening effect ' of having another anti-aircraft ship in company. Sir Charles Forbes, however, had come to the conclusion that the employment of ships for this purpose was wasteful.[1] On 26th April he ' recommended Admiralty to send A.A. batteries and Royal Air Force fighters to counter enemy air action at bases on Norwegian coast in preference to using ships ' and next day he said he should not ' keep a sloop or A.A. cruiser at Aandalsnes during daylight hours. Does not effectively protect base and they shoot away all their ammunition in one day '.[2]

38. Sickle Reinforcements

[PLANS 1, 11

Unlike the principal flights, the first reinforcement for ' Sickle ' came in transports : 600 men in the little *St. Magnus* and *St. Sunniva*, escorted by the destroyers *Jackal* and *Javelin*. The storeship *Cedarbank* in the same convoy was torpedoed and sunk on passage by a U-boat—a serious loss, since she carried A.A. guns and equipment, and transport—but the remainder arrived in daylight[3] on 21st April, a day of snowstorms and low clouds, however, which screened the port from enemy aircraft—one of the few days at Aandalsnes free from attack. Such immunity was exceptional, and the next day (22nd) aircraft disabled the *Pelican* sloop some 50 miles from the coast on her way there to

[1] *See* Sec. 26 *ante*.

[2] An ominous note had been struck by A.T. 0003/20 from the First Sea Lord to the Commander-in-Chief, which ran :—

> ' Recent expenditure of destroyer long range anti-aircraft ammunition has been heavy if the total size of the reserve held is appreciated. This is now reduced to 13,000 rounds of which 6,000 are abroad. Deliveries in the next three weeks should reach 6,000 rounds after which further supplies are not immediately in sight. Although I am unwilling to suggest restriction in the use of any anti-aircraft gun, it is obvious that expenditure of this nature at the recent high rates must be curtailed. Action has been taken to accelerate supply to the maximum and you will be informed when the margin is ample.'

Clearly it was of great importance to keep this information from the fleet, but the Commander-in-Chief had to bear it constantly in mind.

[3] The other reinforcements arrived after dark except a convoy which arrived the afternoon of the 27th ; indeed, they had specific orders to arrive at dusk and ' to sail at daylight even if disembarkation is incomplete '.

give anti-aircraft protection. That evening the *Arethusa*[1] arrived, laden chiefly with stores. She brought among other things some much-wanted 4-in. ammunition for the sloops, machine-guns for the Norwegians, a battery of Oerlikon anti-aircraft guns and the advance party and some stores for the Royal Air Force station on Lesjaskog Lake. She landed everything in a little over four hours that night, which was thought a good evolution ; but her captain remarked that ' a great saving of labour for the ship's company and a reduction of the chaos which occurs when embarking stores for these expeditions could be made if there was a sea transport officer at the place of embarkation who knew what had to be embarked and who could inform the ship's officers what they had to take and whom it was for '. Admiral Edward-Collins, in forwarding the report, concurred : ' I fully agree . . . the recent operations have been in the nature of rush evolutions ; but the old proverb of more haste, less speed, has been very much in evidence.'[2]

As soon as Hammer (the direct attack on Trondheim) was given up, further reinforcements for Sickle were decided on. Major-General Paget went out to take command, two brigades of regular infantry were earmarked, and possibly some field artillery might have followed. As it turned out, only one brigade reached Aandalsnes before the Government decided to withdraw. The following signal shows, however, a distinct advance in the importance of the expedition (A.T. 1731/20th April) :—

> ' It is intended to land a considerable force in the Aandalsnes area with the ultimate object of capturing Trondheim in conjunction with General de Wiart's force at Namsos. Two brigades originally allocated to ' Hammer ' will be landed in Aandalsnes area, so as to gain control of the Dombaas area and isolate Trondheim from the south. Further troops will follow.
>
> (2) This operation will still be referred to as ' Sickle.'
>
> (3) ' Maurice ' is being reinforced by French troops.
>
> (4) The first of the brigades referred to in paragraph 1 will probably land p.m. 23rd and p.m. 25th April.
>
> (5) Immediate steps are being taken to obtain small transports suitable for entering the fjords ; in the meantime it will be necessary for H.M. ships to be used for transporting troops.'

The 15th Brigade actually went, three battalions of Yorkshire regiments, about 2700 all told, with nine anti-tank guns and a battery of Bofors anti-aircraft guns. They sailed in two parties : Admiral Edward-Collins taking the 1st York and Lancaster Regiment and the 1st King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry, the anti-tank guns and half the Bofors guns ; and Admiral Layton taking a battalion of the Green Howards, the rest of the Bofors guns and their crews, General Paget and his staff, and the headquarters troops. There seem to have been ideas of withdrawing already, owing to the threatened destruction of the base by air attack, for the Admiralty made this signal to Captain Denny at Molde (A.T. 2013/21) :—

> ' It must be accepted that piers at Aandalsnes may be destroyed by aircraft at any time : termination of operation on this account cannot be accepted, and you should accordingly be prepared to unload ships into small craft and land stores anywhere you can. Report what could be done about motor transport and guns in these circumstances.'

This one brigade landed successfully at Molde and Aandalsnes.

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[1] The *Arethusa* left Rosyth alone on 22nd April, the day after her return from landing troops of the first flight. (*See* Sec. 37 *ante*.)

[2] Much confusion and delay occurred in landing stores, ammunition, etc., because no working parties were organised by the Army to clear them from the jetties, as they were put ashore.

Admiral Edward-Collins left Rosyth on the 22nd with the *Galatea*, *Sheffield*, *Glasgow*, and the *Vansittart* and *Campbell*, *Ivanhoe* and *Icarus*, *Impulsive* and *Witch*. The flagship carried about 400 men, the two larger ships 700 each, the destroyers 60 each. Besides the land forces they took one of the belated searchlights with its crew and two 3-in. high-angle guns for the naval party at Aalesund, officers and men for the naval base, and a quantity of stores. They arrived in the evening of the 23rd without incident, the *Sheffield* and two destroyers going to Molde, while the rest went on to Aandalsnes. The *Sheffield* went alongside to unload, as did the *Galatea* at Aandalsnes, but the *Glasgow* anchored and sent men and gear on shore in destroyers and local small craft. Having finished their task the cruisers sailed separately for home, each with a couple of destroyers in company, but the *Glasgow* rejoined the flag in the evening, 24th, a few miles north and east of the Shetlands. Soon afterwards, a couple of aircraft attacked them without result. Apart from that, as Admiral Edward-Collins pointed out: ' It is remarkable that my ships have now carried out this operation three times without molestation.'[1]

Admiral Layton left Rosyth on the 24th. He had the *Manchester* and *Birmingham* just home from serving with ' Maurice ' at Namsos, the *York* and the destroyers *Arrow*, *Acheron* and *Griffin*, each ship taking her quota of troops and stores, a little under 1600 men and some 300 tons of stores altogether. The *Manchester* went alongside at Molde in the evening of the 25th, and her ' unloading . . . was carried out with unexpected rapidity '. The *Birmingham* and *York* anchored at Aandalsnes, the destroyers and local craft ferrying troops and stores to the quay. Early in the morning (26th) the *York* and the destroyers sailed for the United Kingdom, but the *Manchester* and *Birmingham* stayed on the coast to support the destroyers cruising in the Trondheim approaches.

On the way north towards Trondheim, before the *York* and destroyers were out of sight, Admiral Layton's ships fell in with German armed trawlers disguised as Dutchmen.

The *Birmingham* sank one, a minelayer, which on falling in with the destroyers had hoisted German colours and managed to ram the *Arrow*, necessitating her return home escorted by the *Acheron*. A little later the *Griffin* captured another trawler fitted for supplying submarines and armed with torpedoes.

These encounters led the Commander-in-Chief to suspect the presence of enemy transports astern of the trawlers, and he accordingly ordered Admiral Layton to sweep to the southward, who altered course accordingly at 1045. Shortly afterwards six destroyers hove in sight, steering to the south-westward. These proved to be the aircraft carriers' relieved screen proceeding to Sullom Voe for fuel. Admiral Layton thereupon ordered them to spread on a line of bearing on their way south and to keep a lookout for enemy supply ships, while he himself with the *Birmingham* covered the area to the eastward of them till 1600, 26th, when he turned to the northward to take up a covering position for the night off the entrance to Trondheim Fjord.

The *Manchester* and *Birmingham* remained in this vicinity till the forenoon of the 28th and then they returned to Scapa, for by this time the retreat from Aandalsnes had been decided on and it was necessary for them to fill up with oil before playing their part in the withdrawal.

During this service they had not been free from air attack. German aircraft had dropped a few bombs, some of which nearly hit the *Birmingham*, in the

[1] The *Arethusa* belonged to Admiral Edward-Collins's squadron.

afternoon of the 25th, three hours before the convoy entered Buddybet; another machine attacked the *Manchester* early on the 26th, after she had cleared the fjords again. Yet another attacked the *Manchester* and *Birmingham* in the evening of the 27th, a hundred miles or so from the coast, as they were going in for the night patrol. But the main weight of the air attacks was falling on the inshore operations. That afternoon (27th), a supply convoy had been seriously harassed—four ships escorted by the *Afridi*, *Witherington* and *Amazon*. So fierce was the attack that only two ships unloaded, one at Molde, the other at Aandalsnes, and the latter did not land all her cargo. The convoy sailed again at 0200 next morning, the escort strengthened by the *Sikh* and *Mohawk*, withdrawn from their patrol in Trondheim Leden ; aircraft attacked the convoy again from 1000 to 1400 on the 28th. This convoy should have arrived in the evening of the 26th, but was late ; and a warning had been sent from Aandalsnes in the morning of the 27th saying, ' Ships must not berth alongside until 2100, and leave by 0200, proceeding to sea for day with escort, otherwise ships will be lost by air attack ' ; but this warning may not have reached the *Afridi*.

39. The situation on shore, 27th-28th April [PLANS 1, 11

To return to Aandalsnes. General Paget arrived on 25th April to hear from Captain Denny that his base and line of communication must soon fail unless protected from the enemy in the air. Forty-eight hours later came a definite proposal to give up the expedition. On the 27th, the General having gone to the front, the commander of the army base staff told the War Office he was ' planning to evacuate Aandalsnes between 1st and 10th May '. The work of the base was restricted to the dark hours, between 2000 and 0600, both afloat and on shore ; the wooden piers were all burnt, and only the concrete quay remained ; the roads were pitted with craters and badly scarred by heavy traffic in melting snow. They were also losing small craft : by the end of the month, for instance, they had lost by air attack seven anti-submarine trawlers out of 12—the first to go being the four cricketers, *Larwood* and *Jardine*, *Bradman* and *Hammond*. Patrols of fighter aircraft from Admiral Wells's carriers did something to protect the base and the troops, yet the General felt bound to put these words in a memorandum he sent home on the 27th : ' Our own air : conspicuous by its absence '. The squadron of Gladiators, flown from the Glorious to Lesjaskog Lake on the 24th, had been virtually destroyed next day, and the ice melting, the lake could no longer serve as a landing ground.

As for the troops at the front, Brigadier Morgan's two battalions had ' had a dusting ', and were now to come out of the fighting zone. The first two battalions of the 15th Brigade took post at Otta, 30 miles beyond Dombaas on the way to Lillehammer, while its last battalion lay farther back near Dombaas itself. The Norwegians had ' probably about the remains of two brigades ' in the district ; they had worked on skis on the flanks of Morgan's men, but were ' liable to disappear without warning '. The enemy ' may have up to two or three divisions ', with probably Bavarians and Austrians accustomed to skis, and served by 6-in. howitzers working very effectively with aircraft, whereas the British had neither guns nor planes. General Paget asked for help in the air, for field artillery (25-pounders), for anti-aircraft guns both long- and short-range, for more infantry. ' Unless immediate help is forthcoming on above lines at once ', said the memorandum of 27th April, ' the whole force may be jeopardized within a period of from four to five days '.

This was no exaggeration. Three days later, on 30th April, the advance troops of the German Army Group XXI made contact with elements of the Trondheim occupation force at Storen (the railway junction some 30 miles to the southward of Trondheim) and in the words of the German Naval Staff appreciation, ' the situation of the Allied troops south of Trondheim can be regarded as desperate '.

But the position had already been recognised by the Allied High Command as hopeless and that night the re-embarkation from the Molde and Aandalsnes area began.

CHAPTER VI

THE WITHDRAWAL FROM CENTRAL NORWAY

40. The Decision to withdraw, 28th April

As previously mentioned, General Carton de Wiart had begun to consider withdrawing from Namsos as early as 21st April, within five days of his arrival there. General Paget, when he reached Aandalsnes on the 25th—a bare week after the first British troops had moved out to meet the enemy—likewise saw that he might soon find that area untenable ; and this opinion he had reiterated in his memorandum of the 27th.

Early next day (28th) came the order for a general withdrawal from Central Norway (A.T. 0339) :—' It has been decided to re-embark the force landed at Namsos and Aandalsnes areas as soon as possible. . . . '. The principal cause of the giving up of these southern expeditions was the German strength in the air. This allowed them to send an army to Norway by sea, unhindered except within the limited capacity of submarines and mining. Once established in Norway, their working with an adequate air force gave German soldiers further advantages. Aircraft transported small parties of troops and quantities of supplies, they directed the fire of artillery, and especially they destroyed the Allies' bases almost at leisure, interrupted only by a few machines working from carriers or flying occasionally the long distance from the British Isles, and by a few short-range guns on shore backed by the long-range fire of one or two sloops, destroyers, or anti-aircraft ships. The immediate occasion of the retreat seems to have been this gradual destruction of the bases, on which the troops depended for almost every need, whether of victuals, fuel or ammunition ; but so long as the Germans retained command of the sea in the Skagerrak and were thus able to reinforce their troops in Southern Norway at will, the final decision in Central Norway could scarcely be in doubt. ' It is impossible ', said the First Lord of the Admiralty, when explaining to Sir Charles Forbes the decision to withdraw from Aandalsnes, ' for 3000 or 4000 men without artillery or air superiority to withstand advance of 70,000 or 80,000 thoroughly equipped Germans '. At the same time he said, ' Feel sure you must be very proud of the way your A.A. craft and, above all, the Fleet Air Arm are comporting themselves '.[1]

41. Plan of the evacuation [PLAN 11

The first plan was to bring off the troops of both expeditions at the same time. Each would need two nights, 1st–2nd and 2nd–3rd May ; but most of ' Primrose' and ' Sickle ' would come from Molde, using Aandalsnes on one night only, and that might have to be a day sooner than the others. The Admiralty put several transports at Sir Charles Forbes's disposal, some of them large ships. The War Office directed that the men should be withdrawn ' regardless of loss of equipment ' ; they calculated there were 6200 men to come from Namsos and 5500 from the Aandalsnes district. Aircraft from Admiral Wells's carriers

[1] A.T.1939/29 April. A.T.1904 of the 10th had given the Admiralty ruling that ' interference with communications in southern areas must be left mainly to submarines, air and mining, aided by intermittent sweeps when forces allow '.

were to cover the retreat, protecting landing places and troopships and attacking the enemy's troops. There was also a plan to attack the forts near Trondheim in order to divert attention : ' It has been agreed a bombardment of the forts, at Trondheim, should be undertaken by battleships or 8-in. cruisers, when desired by G.O.C., during periods of evacuation '. Ships of war ' escorting one or two liners ', said a later signal, should arrive off the approaches at dusk on the first night of embarking, and ' after dark, liners and escorts turn and steer westwards, remainder of force carrying out bombardment of fort at entrance '. Sir Charles Forbes replied to this that the *Valiant* might leave Admiral Wells, with whose carriers she was cruising, in time to attack the forts at dawn on 2nd May, but he had no liners nor destroyers for screening them, ' every destroyer fit to fight and available is being used '.

For the evacuations, he ordered Vice-Admiral Edward-Collins to take charge of the Aandalsnes operations on the first night, and Vice-Admiral Layton to take charge on the second night, while Vice-Admiral Cunningham was to be in command at Namsos on both nights. In order to provide the necessary cruisers and destroyers, he requested that the *Southampton* and *Aurora* should be released from Narvik, and that the *Sheffield*, then giving cover to the *Ark Royal* should be detached to rendezvous with Admiral Edward-Collins. He also asked for the loan of three French contre-torpilleurs.[1]

The actual arrangements differed from the original plan, which could be a point of departure to work from only. ' Primrose ' and ' Sickle ' embarked in two nights, 30th April–1st May and 1st–2nd May, but nearly all came from Aandalsnes, not counting the party from Aalesund. Only some 50 people embarked at Molde ; no troops could go there, owing to the damage to the roads about the town and to the lack of small craft for ferries. ' Maurice ' embarked in one night at Namsos, 2nd–3rd May. Furthermore, air attacks on the carriers on 1st May hampered their work and caused Admiral Wells to give it up that evening ; nor did the bombardment of the Trondheim forts take place.

No German surface ships interfered with the withdrawal. There were one or two asdic contacts with submarines, but the enemy attacked the convoys from the air only, and chiefly the ships from Namsos. Yet between the 1st and 4th May there were always convoys of troops at sea, with generally the cruisers and sometimes the destroyers full of passengers. As a rule each convoy came home divided into small groups of ships, which crossed the North Sea between roughly 63° and 66° N., until they reached the longitude of the Shetlands, when they turned to pass west of those islands and the Orkneys. Admiral Wells, who reached Scapa with the carriers on 3rd May, had the *Valiant* in his squadron from 30th April onwards. Besides her, there were three capital ships in the Home Fleet : the *Resolution*, working under Lord Cork in the Narvik–Tromsö area far to the northward ; the *Rodney* and *Repulse* at Scapa with Admiral Forbes, the last-named ship ready ' to meet possibility of attack on ships engaging in evacuation ', and her screen of destroyers earmarked.

Before the evacuation of troops took place, the *Glasgow* was sent to Molde to take away the King of Norway. She arrived there with two destroyers, the *Jackal* and *Javelin*, late on 29th April and sailed again the same night, attacked from the air as she cast off from the burning quay—she had come alongside, says Captain Denny, ' with fire hoses playing, the whole scene being brilliantly lit by the flames of the burning town '. She took on board the King, the Crown Prince, members of the Government and of the Allies' legations, and

[1] These could not be spared, as they were required for service in the Mediterranean. It was later decided, too, that the *Aurora* should not take part in the operation.

part of the base staff and so on, anticipating the general withdrawal—about 280 people all told, besides a quantity of gold bullion. They went to Malangen Fjord, near Tromsö, where the Norwegian passengers shifted into a Norwegian man-of-war to go to Tromsö, and the British ships went home.

42. The Retreat from Aandalsnes, Molde and Aalesund [PLAN 11

Captain Pegram of the *Glasgow* found at Molde that Captain Denny had not received the signals about withdrawing. Captain Denny and Brigadier Hogg, commander of the army base staff, expected ships on the 29th, the day before that actually arranged;[1] they had planned to send away 1000 men from Aandalsnes that night and supposed the *Glasgow* had come for that purpose. The growing scale of attack from the air added to the difficulties. The *Black Swan* had been hit on the 28th, after a couple of strenuous days in which she had fired 2000 rounds of 4-in. and 4000 of pom-pom ammunition ; and she had sailed for Scapa next day, making 12 knots in a heavy sea despite a three-foot hole in her bottom.[2] On 29th–30th April, for the first time, the enemy attacked throughout the night. The *Fleetwood*, which had relieved the *Black Swan*, speedily expended her ammunition, and went home early on the 30th, taking 340 troops—part of those collected against the arrival of ships from home on the 29th—a prodigious number of passengers for a vessel of her size. ' A.A. fire from ships subject to continuous attacks themselves all day ', said Captain Poland, ' will never meet situation ; strong A.A. backed up by full aircraft support essential '. Still the departure of the sloops meant taking away the only long-range weapons there were, apart from those in the ships that came to carry troops away on the 30th, until the arrival on 1st May of the *Auckland* and *Calcutta*, sent in haste by Sir Charles Forbes from Scapa.

Owing to the air attacks, nobody could tell whether ships would still be able to go alongside, when the time came, or whether men and gear must come off in boats. Apart from that, General Paget could give little notice of the moment for withdrawing from the battle. Moreover, communication was precarious between the base and the fighting zone and between the two ports themselves, and after the *Fleetwood* sailed the expedition had no communication with the ships coming to its relief. In these circumstances there was little scope for preparing beforehand. ' The comparative success achieved ', remarked Captain Denny, ' was due more to good fortune than to thorough organisation such as displayed at Gallipoli '. And the good fortune, he added, lay in the absence of attack from the air each night the expedition embarked. Admiral Layton considered, from the way the Germans bombed possible troop-billets right up to the end, that they did not expect an immediate retreat.[3]

Admiral Edward-Collins arrived for the first night's work at Aandalsnes at 2230 on the 30th with the *Galatea* and *Arethusa*, the *Sheffield*, wearing the flag

[1] A.T.2127/29, announcing the decision to commence the evacuation on the night of 30th April/1st May, was made in Flag Officer's cypher and as it did not include instructions to pass the message to the military authorities, the Commander-in-Chief, H.F., presumed that the War Office would inform the G.O.C., Aandalsnes.

[2] The Commander-in-Chief, concurring with R.A., Destroyers, considered the *Black Swan*'s conduct on the occasion ' outstanding and in accordance with the very highest traditions '.

[3] The German Naval Appreciation, from air reports, was that the enemy intended ' to re-embark troops landed at Aandalsnes as quickly as possible during the night, and to use them at another place, that is at Namsos '.

of Rear-Admiral Clarke,[1] and *Southampton*, six destroyers[2] and the small transport *Ulster Monarch*, having sent the *Tartar* and the *Ulster Prince* to Molde the same night. All had come from Scapa except the *Sheffield* and *Southampton*, which joined at sea, the former from cruising with Admiral Wells and the latter from the Narvik squadron. There had been neither time nor information enough to give written orders, and the Admiral made his final arrangements during the passage. Brigadier Hogg signalled during the afternoon, as the ships approached the coast : ' Probably unsafe to berth transports, but worth while trying with destroyers ; if this fails, propose using destroyers' boats along south shore eastwards of Aandalsnes '. But the Admiral determined to go alongside if he could, ' as most fortunately proved to be the case. We should never have embarked the numbers concerned in the time available in ships' boats from the beach in the dark '. Accordingly, he went in the *Galatea* straight alongside the concrete quay, the one proper landing place that survived. The *Walker*, outside the flagship, carried troops to the *Sheffield*, which had anchored off the town. The *Arethusa* went alongside after the *Galatea* had finished, and took on board the last party that night from Aandalsnes itself. Some 1800 men embarked in the three cruisers. ' Although dead beat and ravenously hungry ' they went on board ' in a well-disciplined and orderly manner ' but many ' were without arms or equipment '.

There were two outlying parties near Aandalsnes to gather in, besides Captain Denny's people at Molde : about 300 men had been sent to Alfarnes, 6 miles north of Aandalsnes at the mouth of another fjord, and about 100 marines were at Veblungsnes, a mile or so from Aandalsnes on the west point of the river's mouth. Admiral Edward-Collins had sent the *Wanderer* and *Sikh* to Alfarnes as the squadron came in, and the *Southampton* when he found he did not need her for the main body. The *Wanderer* took the ground with 150 troops on board, and the *Sikh* had to tow her off ; eventually the *Sikh* and *Southampton* brought the whole party away. The *Westcott* and *Walker* brought off the marines in their boats ; Colonel Simpson, who was wounded, and two or three people with him at Veblungsnes had gone on board the *Mashona* already. Meanwhile, the *Tartar* and *Ulster Prince* had embarked Captain Denny and the remainder of his staff, Admiral Diesen and other Norwegian officers, and a few soldiers and others—all there were to come from Molde, in fact, but General Ruge and his staff, the General refusing to leave unless he could be sure of going direct to another port in Norway. Thus each ship had her work to do, except the transport *Ulster Monarch*, which went away empty. The Admiral had told off destroyers to support the main embarkation with their guns and others to carry out an anti-submarine patrol in the fjord, but the business of embarking troops left little opportunity for other services ; it was as well there was no enemy about. The only opposition came from the air later, as the ships were leaving the outer fjords between 0300 and 0400 on 1st May, when German aircraft dropped a few bombs near some ships without effect. ' Once again ', says Admiral Edward-Collins, ' and contrary to all expectations, Romsdals Fjord was entered, the operation completed, and forces withdrawn without loss or damage through enemy action '.

The ships had sailed as they finished their tasks, and they crossed the North Sea again in ones and twos. They had on board some 2200 men, but no guns. The number still to come was unknown. In a signal to Admiral Layton, then on his way to Aandalsnes with two cruisers and three destroyers for the second

[1] Rear-Admiral M. L. Clarke, D.S.C., had hoisted his flag as R.A. 2nd in command 18th C.S. on 21st April.

[2] *Somali, Mashona, Sikh, Wanderer, Walker, Westcott.*

night's work, Admiral Edward-Collins put the number of British troops at 1500 with possibly Norwegian troops and refugees as well, but he warned his successor that ' as a result of continual bombing night and day, all . . . at Aandalsnes are shaken, and it appeared no one there really knew the position at the front '. The *Ulster Monarch* joined Admiral Layton ' in view of the indefinite numbers ' ; unluckily she had to turn back with a cracked piston, but the *Somali* and *Mashona* did a second night's service. Later in the day, Sir Charles Forbes ordered the *Southampton* and some more destroyers to go once again to Aandalsnes in case a third night should prove necessary, the War Office having worked out that there might be 2900 British troops still to come away, some of whom might not be able to reach Aandalsnes from the fighting zone in time to embark in Admiral Layton's ships. However, two nights sufficed.

Aandalsnes suffered the usual attacks from the air on 1st May. A Royal Air Force patrol flew above the town for its protection in the morning, and first the *Auckland* and then the *Calcutta* arrived from home, the *Auckland* having seen the attack on Admiral Edward-Collins as she came through another fjord south of him. The Germans dropped bombs occasionally throughout the day, but made a determined attack on the two ships late in the afternoon for above an hour and a half. During this attack there came peremptory orders from Sir Charles Forbes to withdraw : he had already told the two ships to go out, ' if bombing is severe ', until required for the night's work. They went out accordingly, Commander Hewitt of the *Auckland* remarking : ' It was most heartening to observe that *Calcutta* adjusted her speed so as to remain in company—this in spite of the fact that she was the more heavily attacked ' ; and the two ships cheered one another when the attack was over. They reached open water outside Buddybet in time to meet and to turn back with Admiral Layton. Aircraft had made several attacks on Admiral Layton's ships during the afternoon. No sooner did he enter Buddybet in the evening than more appeared, perhaps the same machines that had lately harassed the *Calcutta* and *Auckland*, and the squadron was attacked intermittently for an hour or so as it steamed through the fjords. The fire of the two large cruisers and the *Calcutta* and *Auckland* brought down one machine, but bombs from another very nearly hit the flagship.

Admiral Layton now had the *Manchester* and *Birmingham* and five destroyers[1] besides the two A.A. ships. Sir Charles Forbes had offered him two small transports as well, but their speed was only 16 knots and ' a quick get away would be essential ' so he refused them, though he accepted the *Ulster Monarch* from Admiral Edward-Collins on learning how uncertain was the number of troops he had to deal with. Like his predecessor, he had given no written orders, ' the situation being so doubtful ', but contented himself with giving general instructions by word of mouth before leaving Scapa. As the squadron approached the coast of Norway, he had sent the *Somali* to Aalesund to collect the Primrose detachment there. Off Molde, which was covered with a pall of smoke, the *Diana* parted company to carry General Ruge and his staff from Molde to Tromsö. The other ships came to Aandalsnes a little before 2300 on the 1st. The cruisers anchored, being too long to go alongside, while two of the three destroyers went to the quay, which was still undamaged, and in an hour or so nearly 1300 men were ferried to the two cruisers. General Paget then said there remained but a rearguard of some 200 men. The Admiral wanted to sail betimes, that the ships might reach open water before dawn, when he expected fog ; he did not want to be held up in the fjords with the ships

[1] *Inglefield, Delight, Diana, Somali, Mashona.*

full of troops. The *Birmingham* therefore sailed as soon as she had her quota, and the *Manchester* followed shortly afterwards with the destroyers. This left the *Calcutta* and *Auckland* for the rearguard. The *Calcutta* found some 700 men, whom she got on board in 15 minutes, and the *Auckland* took the true rearguard, about 240 men, who ' embarked with such commendable promptitude that the ship was alongside for only 7 minutes '. They all reached home with no more than patches of fog to contend with in the fjords, the ships carrying much the same numbers from Aandalsnes as the night before, about 2200, to which the 250 from Aalesund in the *Somali* must be added. The five remaining anti-submarine trawlers attached to the expedition went home also.

43. The Retreat from Namsos [PLAN 11

When the order came on 28th April to withdraw, there were at Namsos the *Carlisle*, anti-aircraft ship, flying Rear-Admiral Vivian's flag, the *Bittern* sloop, and some trawlers. There were also two French storeships with their escort of two destroyers, whose presence enabled General Carton de Wiart to take the first step towards withdrawing by sending back a French battalion of 850 men then in Namsos itself ; they sailed for Scapa on the 29th. A small party (about 100 chasseurs–alpins and a section of British light A.A. guns) left in the *Janus* next day for Mosjoen—the first of a series of landings in this area designed to impede the advance of the enemy on Narvik after the withdrawal from Central Norway.[1]

The *Carlisle* which had gone north to Skjel Fjord to oil on the 29th returning on the 30th found the *Bittern* disabled by a bomb, and Admiral Vivian had to order her to be sunk. Attacks from the air had also disabled three trawlers, which had to be sunk, too, leaving five fit for service. Having consulted with the General, who said ' the presence of a cruiser was of great moral value, but of little value for direct defence ', Admiral Vivian then proposed to the Commander-in-Chief that the *Carlisle* and three trawlers should go to sea during daylight hours to preserve them for their coming duties ; for the *Carlisle* would be wanted to protect the troopships from air attack, while the trawlers were to serve as ferries. This signal crossing one from Sir Charles that gave orders in the same sense, the *Carlisle* sailed at daylight. Fog prevented her return at night, and early on 2nd May, when about 130 miles from the coast, she joined Vice-Admiral Cunningham, who was coming to fetch away the expedition.

Admiral Cunningham had the *Devonshire* and *York*, the *Montcalm* (Admiral Derrien), five destroyers[2] and the transports *El d'Jezair* (Admiral Cadart), *El Kantara* and *El Mansour*, while four destroyers[3] had gone ahead in circumstances to be described later. He had sailed from Scapa on 29th April meaning to bring off half the expedition in the transports in the night of 1st–2nd May and the other half in the cruisers the night following ; and Sir Charles Forbes warning him that the work might have to be done all in one night, he had an alternative plan for that contingency. ' I was fortunate ', he writes, ' in that time admitted of my interviewing Admirals Derrien and Cadart, and of my being able to explain my intentions in detail to the majority of the commanding officers of cruisers and destroyers in my force, to issue certain written instructions, and to acquaint French warships and transports of what cruising dispositions I proposed to use '.

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[1] *See* Chapter VIII *postea*.

[2] *Afridi, Nubian, Hasty, Imperial ;* French *Bison*.

[3] ***Kelly**, Grenade, Griffen, Maori*.

In outline the first plan was as follows. The three transports and six destroyers would leave the flag at 2000 on 1st May off Kya Light, some 20 miles south-west of the mouth of Namsen Fjord and 40 short of Namsos. They were to fetch the first half of the troops, about 3000 men ; and as soon as each transport had her load she would sail independently with one destroyer. The Admiral would cruise off Kya Light during the night, with the cruisers and three destroyers, ready to meet the loaded transports in the morning and to escort them to the westward until the time came for the cruisers to go in with six destroyers for the rest of the troops. He would make Kya Light again at 2000 on 2nd May on his way in. On arrival off Namsos, the cruisers were to keep underway, while destroyers and trawlers brought off the troops as before, and this time the destroyers, too, were to carry troops, as were the *Carlisle* and *Bittern*.

Admiral Cunningham gave out his alternative plan by signal on 30th April, by which time he knew that one battalion had left Namsos already, so that the number still to come was but 5400 men. He proposed to reach the mouth of Namsen Fjord at 2100 on the appointed day, when the three transports were to go in with four destroyers, followed in half an hour by the *York* and a destroyer, while the *Devonshire*, *Montcalm* and the other destroyers stayed outside. Each transport was to embark 1700 men at the stone pier and sail again with one destroyer when ready ; the *York* and her destroyer were to stop a couple of miles short of Namsos to receive troops from trawlers, and would sail with the *Carlisle* after the last transport ; the fifth destroyer would stay for stragglers. The convoy would go home in two, perhaps three, groups of ships. In the main, this second plan was actually followed.

In the evening of the 30th, when the signal describing the above arrangements had been made, Admiral Cunningham passed the carrier squadron then on the way to cover the retreat from Aandalsnes with its fighter aircraft, and Admiral Wells signalled that he should send up fighters over Namsos on 2nd May ; but this unhappily fell through, owing to the German air attack on the 1st. German aircraft molested Admiral Cunningham also on 1st May, and two machines, attacking in the afternoon, nearly hit the *Devonshire* and a transport with their bombs. Then the squadron ran into thick and widespread fog in the evening, some 40 miles short of Kya Light, which forced the Admiral to turn out to sea and prevented him from sending the transports to Namsos that night. The *Maori* went on, however, having missed the signal to turn to seaward, and reported herself near Kya Light about 2200 with a visibility of 2 cables. On this, Captain Lord Louis Mountbatten suggested his joining the *Maori* with his own three ships, *Kelly*, *Grenade*, *Griffin*, ' with a view to the four of us taking off most of the troops due to be evacuated from Namsos on this, the first night '. Admiral Cunningham approved, so the little flotilla groped its way in by sounding and asdic, the fog growing thicker than ever, only to find it quite clear in Namsen Fjord at 0500 on the 2nd. Namsos thus exposed ' once more to bombing attacks ', Lord Louis decided to go out again and hide in fog banks until he might join the squadron on its way to Namsos in the evening. He met the Admiral again about 2000 with the *Maori* slightly damaged by a near miss (she had 23 casualties), a German aircraft having sighted the destroyers on the edge of a fog bank too low to cover their masts.

The delay caused by the fog made Admiral Cunningham specially anxious to do his business in one night. He had signalled the gist of his plan for this to Namsos, suggesting 1st–2nd May as the date. General Carton de Wiart had received the signal through Admiral Vivian, but had to answer that it would not do ; he could not disengage all his troops in time for that night ; moreover

he must have two nights for the whole task. When the squadron turned back out of the fog in the evening of 1st May, Admiral Cunningham had once more proposed to Admiral Vivian that they should embark the whole expedition the following night ; again Admiral Vivian, who was then at sea in the *Carlisle*, answered that two nights were needed, which agrees with a signal the General made to the War Office, that it was ' not a question of shipping, but of hours of dark '. But next morning, the 2nd, Admiral Cunningham decided to send ships enough to Namsos to bring off all the troops that night, if the weather allowed, and made known his intention to the Admiralty by signal. His reasoning appears in his report as follows :—

> ' 840 of the 6200 troops which I had originally been informed would be evacuated from Namsos had already been removed . . . on the night of 28th/29th April, leaving about 5400 to be embarked. I had sufficient transport for this number, but, as far as time required to embark was concerned, I appeared to be limited by (*a*) the number of large ships that could be safely operated at Namsos at one time ; (*b*) the facilities, piers, ferrying craft, etc., available, which were reported as sadly lacking ; (*c*) the reiterated statements of C.S.20, and military authorities through him, that evacuation could not be carried out on one night only, because of the above.[1]
>
> I was uncertain of the state of affairs ashore and how long evacuation could be delayed with safety from the military point of view ; and I could not lose sight of the fact that should the fog persist or recur after to-night I might be faced with the necessity of attempting to carry out the remainder of the evacuation in daylight, a project which all the evidence tended to show would be extremely hazardous, if not impossible . . . I was convinced that to attempt to spread evacuation over two nights would be courting disaster. I therefore decided in any case to throw enough shipping into Namsos on first night to permit of complete evacuation and, if the General was unable to disengage his troops in time to take advantage of the opportunity thus afforded, to endeavour to evacuate the remnant in the remaining cruisers and destroyers the following night.
>
> In coming to this decision, I was much influenced, firstly by the gallant bearing of Admiral Cadart and by his confidence in his ability to place two of his transports simultaneously, and subsequently the third, alongside the stone pier ; and secondly by my own conviction, formed from discussions on 29th April with Captain Lees of H.M.S. *Calcutta* and Commander Ravenhill of H.M.S. *Nubian*, both lately returned from Namsos, that the present reports upon the damage to the wooden pier were somewhat overdrawn.'

Admiral Vivian had joined Admiral Cunningham in the morning of 2nd May, fog preventing the *Carlisle*'s return to Namsos the night before. Early in the afternoon came a signal from the Admiralty to say the General reported things ' getting serious ' and he wished to see a naval officer who knew the plan for withdrawing the expedition. Admiral Cunningham then gave Admiral Vivian the detailed plan of the 30th for embarking all in one night, and sent him ahead to Namsos. As soon as he arrived, about 2000 that evening, Admiral Vivian consulted with Generals Carton de Wiart and Audet. He told them it was essential that the last troopship should be loaded by 0200 next morning, the 3rd, so that all might be clear of the fjord by 0330, and that guns and stores should be embarked only if it could be done at the same time as the men. The Generals agreed.

In the meantime Admiral Cunningham had approached the coast, seeking shelter in banks of fog from shadowing aircraft. The French transports had fuel enough for one night more only, so the Admiral prepared to do the work with the ships of war alone, should the fog persist. However, Admiral Vivian reported clear weather inshore, and soon after 1830 the squadron ran out of the

[1] C.S.20 was Admiral Vivian. Presumably the General's signal, that it was not a question of shipping, had not yet reached Admiral Cunningham.

fog some 40 miles from the mouth of Namsen Fjord. Then the transports and their escorts parted company, while the Admiral cruised off Kya Light with the *Devonshire, Montcalm* and four destroyers.

Captain Vian in the *Afridi* led the transports in, followed by the *York* and *Nubian,* and joined in the fjord by the *Kelly, Grenade* and *Griffin.* Admiral Cadart went straight alongside the stone pier in the *El d'Jezair* about 2230, and the *El Kantara* secured outside him. The *El Mansour,* underway off the town, and the *York,* further out, as had been arranged, both got their loads from trawlers and destroyers, which fetched the troops from the wooden pier. The transports sailed as soon as they had their loads, followed by the *York* and *Carlisle,* all accompanied by destroyers. The *El Mansour* cleared the fjord at 0230, about the time the last transport was leaving the pier that morning of 3rd May. Admiral Cunningham joined a second destroyer to her escort and sent the *York* and *Nubian* to overtake her. So, too, the *Montcalm* and *Bison* joined the *El Kantara* and her destroyer, while the *Devonshire, Carlisle* and four destroyers joined the *El d'Jezair.*

The first group of ships crossed the North Sea independently, and reached Scapa without adventure. But German aircraft harassed the rest of the squadron that day for nearly seven hours. Admiral Cunningham had hoped to find shelter in fog until well away from the coast, but the fog cleared as the sun rose, so they had ' perfect bombing weather '. The enemy attacked five times between 0845 and 1530, at distances of from 140 to 220 miles from their airfield at Vaernes near Trondheim ; they succeeded in destroying two ships, the *Bison* and *Afridi,* at a cost of two or three machines shot down out of some 50 that attacked.[1] For the first three attacks—0845–1030—the aircraft came in waves of a dozen, and singled out the *Devonshire* and *Montcalm,* dropping bombs very near those ships, and disabling the *Bison* in the last attack of the three. Her survivors were rescued by the *Grenade, Afridi* and *Imperial* ; ' Commander R. C. Boyle, R.N., of the *Grenade* very gallantly secured the stern of his ship to the sinking *Bison,* despite burning oil and exploding ammunition and was responsible for saving the lives of many of the *Bison*'s ship's company by this act '.[2] At 1400, whilst rejoining the squadron after sinking the wreck of the *Bison,* the *Afridi* was hit by two bombs, and she eventually capsized, losing about 100 killed, including some of the *Bison*'s people and some men of the York and Lancaster regiment—the only army casualties incurred in the evacuation—that she had on board. In the last attack, at 1530, the enemy bombed the *Griffin* and *Imperial,* but without effect, as these ships were rejoining the flag with survivors from the *Afridi.*

After the attacks in the forenoon, Admiral Cunningham concentrated his ships and Admiral Derrien's, forming cruisers and transports in single line ahead ' for mutual support ' with the *Carlisle* astern. They arrived at Scapa on the 5th, a day later than the *York*'s group. The Admiral writes of this passage from Norway :—

> ' The manner in which the transports *El d'Jezair* and *El Kantara,* under the command of Contre-amiral Cadart, were manœuvred at high speed to conform to the movements of the escorting vessels during the air attacks is worthy of the

[1] Admiral Cunningham says the *Carlisle* gave ample warning of every attack, and her ' assistance in this respect and by reason of the accuracy of her anti-aircraft fire proved invaluable ' ; but she had only an hour and a half's allowance of ammunition left after the third attack.

[2] Commander-in-Chief, Home Fleet (H.F. Narrative, par. 254.)

highest praise ; they also hotly engaged all aircraft sighted, and thereby contributed their quota to the general defence of the convoy. The loyal and understanding co-operation afforded to me by Contre-amiral Derrien and his squadron greatly lightened my task and contributed materially to the success of the operation . . . and the bearing of officers and men in all ships of my force, under extremely trying conditions, was fully in accordance with the highest tradition.'

The arrival at Scapa of Vice-Admiral Cunningham's force from Namsos brought to a close the sorry story of the campaign in Central Norway. Though it was impossible not to regret the turn events had taken, declared the Commander-in-Chief, Home Fleet, he could not but admire the way in which all units under his command had done their duty and overcome every difficulty with which they had been confronted ; and he accordingly sent the following message to all concerned :—

' To Home Fleet, British, Polish, French and Norwegian Warships and merchant vessels attached to the Home Fleet :—

During the last three weeks you have been engaged upon two of the most difficult operations of war that naval forces are required to undertake. You may be proud that you have carried out these operations with the loss at sea of only about twelve officers and men of the Army in the face of heavy air attacks. I am proud to command a fleet that has shown itself capable of meeting the heavy demands made upon it with such determination and success.'

CHAPTER VII

THE EXPEDITION TO NARVIK: PHASE I (14TH APRIL–7TH MAY)

44. Inception of Operation Rupert

In the meantime, while the brief campaign in Central Norway was reaching its inevitable conclusion, the expedition to Narvik, though not as yet seriously threatened by the enemy, had also received a check. The rosy hopes of a speedy recapture of the port, before the enemy recovered from the effects of Admiral Whitworth's blow on 13th April, speedily vanished, for reasons which will be apparent later. Once missed, the opportunity did not recur. Moreover, an unusually protracted spell of bad weather and deep snow compelled the postponement of a serious attempt till the latter part of May.

To recapitulate, the Government decided on 10th April to send this expedition, which was, in fact, the child of ' Avonmouth ' in Plan ' R.4 ' ; its first troops left British waters on the 12th ; but half these troops went to Namsos instead, the Government then expecting ' reduced opposition ' at Narvik, and desiring to recover Trondheim as soon as possible. So early as the 11th, at a meeting of the naval staff that night, Admiral Phillips (Deputy Chief of the Staff) had questioned the wisdom of sending ' all our readily available ' troops to Narvik. He argued that it had been decided at a time when Norway seemed at the point of coming to terms with Germany, when ' it would be essential to secure our important interests in the Narvik area ' ; now he ' considered that the taking of Narvik would not help the Norwegians directly, nor would it improve our position in the eyes of the world to any great extent ' whereas ' Namsos was the key to retaking Trondheim, and . . . a footing in that area was important from a military point of view '. However, the Admiralty and the War Office decided to go on with ' Rupert ' as arranged, and to give ' further consideration ' to a landing at Namsos. The change of plan on the 14th and the diversion to Namsos of other troops later meant that ' Rupert ' had but one brigade of infantry until 27th April, when three battalions of Chasseurs-Alpins joined. Yet this does not seem to have affected the fortunes of the expedition greatly ; for, apart from other things, without troops trained and equipped to fight in deep snow, very little could be done before the ' long awaited ' thaw, which came only at the end of the month.

45. Opening moves : Conflicting instructions [PLAN 14

The *Southampton*, screened by the *Escapade* and *Electra*, arrived in Vaags Fjord early on the 14th, having on board General Mackesy, commanding the land forces ; Captain Maund, the naval chief of staff ; and two companies of the 1st Scots Guards. In the first place they went to Harstad on the west shore of the fjord, where the army base was to be. The General having consulted with the authorities at the place, and learning that the 6th Norwegian Division under General Fleischer lay in the Bardu district north-east of Narvik, they crossed then to the mainland, and the Scots Guards landed near Salangen in Sag Fjord to work with the Norwegian troops.

Lord Cork had sailed in the *Aurora* from Rosyth to take command of the expedition by sea at the same time as General Mackesy left Scapa. He, too, meant to go first to Harstad to join the General ; for he had not met him before. On the 14th, however, as the *Aurora* approached the coast, a signal from Admiral Whitworth, then in Vest Fjord with the *Warspite* and some destroyers, put the German strength in Narvik at some 2000 men, probably with little artillery, and emphasized his ' impressions ' of the night before, that the Germans were ' thoroughly frightened ' by saying :—

> 'I am convinced that Narvik can be taken by direct assault without fear of meeting serious opposition on landing. I consider that the main landing force need only be small, but it must have the support of (his squadron) or one of similar composition.'[1]

Thereupon Lord Cork, whose ' impression on leaving London was quite clear that it was desired by H.M. Government to turn the enemy out of Narvik at the earliest possible moment, and that I was to act with all promptitude in order to attain this result ', ordered the *Southampton* to meet him that night in Skjel Fjord. He thought of attempting Narvik next morning with the 350 Scots Guards from the *Southampton* and a party of seamen and marines from all the larger ships and from the *Penelope* and destroyers repairing at Skjel Fjord. He made this signal to the General :—

> 'In view of successful naval action at Narvik yesterday, 13th April, and as enemy appear thoroughly frightened, suggest we take every advantage of this before enemy has recovered. If you concur and subject to information we shall receive tonight 14th April, from *Warspite*, I should be most willing to land military force now in *Southampton* at Narvik at daylight tomorrow, Monday, from *Aurora* and destroyers. Supporting fire could be provided by cruisers and destroyers, and I could assist with a naval and marine landing party of 200 if you wish.'

But nothing came of this plan. Owing to the peculiar wireless-telegraphy conditions in Norway, the *Southampton* did not receive Lord Cork's first signal until the afternoon, by which time her troops had landed in Sag Fjord to join the Norwegians—' one of the first objects laid down for the army by the War Office '. And, says Lord Cork, ' any idea of making an attempt with naval forces would have, in any case, been rendered difficult by receipt of A.T. 2347/14, in which appears : " We think it imperative that you and General should be together and act together and that no attack should be made except in concert." During the night, therefore, the *Aurora* went round towards Vaags Fjord.

The main body of the troops arrived next day, 15th, meeting the *Aurora* outside by the mouth of And Fjord in the morning. They were the 24th Brigade : the 1st Irish Guards, 2nd South Wales Borderers, and the rest of the 1st Scots Guards. They came in three large transports, with the *Protector* netlayer and *Vindictive* repair ship, convoyed by the *Valiant* and nine destroyers. The little harbour of Harstad having but a narrow entrance, the transports were to anchor in Bygden, a channel between two islands 10 miles across the fjord, whence destroyers and local shipping would ferry soldiers and stores to the base. But as they were steaming through And Fjord, a ' military outpost ' reported a submarine in Vaags Fjord. The *Fearless* and *Brazen*, screening ahead, proceeded through Topsundet and carried out an attack with five depth charges, ' which literally blew the U-boat to the surface in the middle of the pattern. The crew abandoned their vessel, *U.49*, and started screaming in the most

[1] *See* Sec. 18 *ante*.

dreadful fashion '[1]; nearly all were saved, and while engaged on this rescue work, the *Brazen* picked up papers which gave the whole of the U-boat disposition for the invasion of Norway.[2]

The convoy arrived at Vaags Fjord in due course, landing troops and stores that afternoon and the day following. German aircraft harassed them at the anchorage and during the passage to Harstad, as they did the troops for Namsos at Lillesjona. They did no material damage; but the General remarks that his force had no defence against these attacks, which 'complicated the operation' of landing.

While this was going on, Captain de Salis was reconnoitring Narvik harbour and Rombaks Fjord with the *Faulknor* and *Zulu*, two of the destroyers Admiral Whitworth had working in Vest Fjord; and that night Captain de Salis signalled his opinion that a landing on Rombaks Fjord, to advance on Narvik from the north-east, would not be opposed by fixed defences, and might be covered by destroyers' guns. Lord Cork had intended to assault the place on the 16th, when disappointed of his plan for the day before. The chances of success would depend largely on how much Admiral Whitworth's action had affected the spirit of the enemy and how far ships' guns could support the infantry; for the Germans had probably as many men as the British, and they seem to have had a few Norwegian guns as well, whereas the British had no artillery.

But at this stage an unexpected difficulty confronted him; for at his first meeting with General Mackesy on the 15th he 'was astonished to hear' that the General's orders, given him just prior to sailing, 'ruled out any idea of attempting an opposed landing. Thus the General and myself left the United Kingdom with diametrically opposite views as to what was required'.

General Mackesy gives his views in his final report:—

> 'During 14th April and the following days, all available information pointed to Narvik itself being strongly held, and to the fact that the naval action of 13th April had by no means demoralized the garrison as a whole. The probability was that the garrison had, in fact, been increased by nearly 1000 good fighting men from the sunken German ships; this was fully confirmed by subsequent intelligence reports. My troops had been embarked for a peaceful landing at a friendly and organised port and could not be ready for active operations for some days . . .
>
> The country was covered by snow up to four feet and more in depth; even at sea level there were several feet of snow. Blizzards, heavy snowstorms, bitter winds, and very low night temperature were normal. Indeed, until the middle of May, even those magnificent mountain soldiers the French Chasseurs-Alpins suffered severely from frostbite and snow blindness. Troops who were not equipped with and skilled in the use of skis or snow-shoes were absolutely incapable of operating tactically at all. I had no such troops at my disposal when I first landed. Shelter from the weather was of vital importance.
>
> It soon became certain that the enemy held Narvik in considerable strength. All the existing defences had been handed over intact by the Norwegian garrison. A personal reconnaissance convinced me that topography favoured the defence, and that an opposed landing was quite out of the question so long as the deep snow and existing weather conditions persisted, and so long as my force lacked landing craft, tanks, adequate artillery support, adequate anti-aircraft defence and

[1] Home Fleet Narrative, para. 219.

[2] *See* Sec. 20 *ante*.

The Admiralty promulgated these dispositions on 16th and 17th April, and at 0210, 17th, directed Rear-Admiral (D) to arrange for an anti-submarine striking force of nine destroyers to operate against the U-boats in the Orkney and Shetland areas; but it was found impossible, owing to other commitments, to provide this number.

air co-operation. The problem was, of course, not merely one of landing, but one of carrying out a subsequent advance of several miles; yet, owing to the configuration of the ground, not even during the first mile could support be given by ships' guns.

I decided, therefore, that my first objective must be to secure the Oijord and Ankenes peninsulas, north and south of Narvik, from which in due course observed fire could be brought to bear on the enemy defences. Both these peninsulas were held by the enemy.'

Lord Cork gave up his thoughts of immediate attack, and he reported so on the 16th. On this the Admiralty urged the importance of an ' early capture ', warning him at the same time that certain battalions of chasseurs-alpins would not be coming, though apparently earmarked for Narvik hitherto, that the *Warspite* and some of his destroyers would be soon wanted elsewhere, that the Germans would reinforce and supply their garrison by air. But Lord Cork himself, now that ' the chance of a coup de main had passed ' had to own defeat by the snow. ' I personally tested this ', he says, ' and also landed a section of marines to do the same, and found it easy to sink to one's waist, and to make any progress was exhausting '. Instead of a direct assault, he proposed to bombard Narvik from the sea, ' in the hope that the result might cause the enemy to evacuate or surrender the town '. If that failed—as it did—they must wait upon the weather; and as a step towards the General's plan of securing a foothold either side of the port, the Irish Guards landed on the 19th in Bogen Inlet, on the north shore of Ofot Fjord, and the South Wales Borderers went to Ballangen, on the south shore, a week later. As for the chasseurs, General Mackesy protested that without them he was ' definitely inferior ' to the enemy, so he asked for other troops in their room, but the War Office said they had none to send.[1]

On the 20th the Government appointed Lord Cork supreme commander of the expedition.

46. Operations in Ofot Fjord, 16th-26th April [PLAN 14

Throughout the operation of ' Rupert ' force a detached squadron in Ofot Fjord harassed the enemy continuously in a smaller way. The service seems to have started from a request of General Mackesy's on the 16th to destroy shipping in Rombaks and Herjangs Fjords, through which the Germans supplied their outlying posts, especially about Gratangen, 15 miles north of Narvik. This request Lord Cork had passed on to Admiral Whitworth, who suggested cruisers and destroyers should be used to attack shipping, piers, and bridges in and near the fjords, including the merchantmen in Narvik, which ' were left afloat on 13th April because it was believed that Narvik harbour could be occupied almost immediately '. Captain de Salis commanded at first with a couple of destroyers. Then Captain Hamilton came in the *Aurora* with more destroyers—it was in the *Aurora* on the 20th that General Mackesy made the reconnaissance he mentions in his report quoted above. The *Enterprise*, which had arrived from home on the 17th, joined Captain Hamilton after that reconnaissance; they destroyed a railway bridge on the 21st and fired on Narvik next day ' to harass the enemy ' on the promontory. Captain Hamilton reports that, out of two cruisers and five destroyers at his command, ' one cruiser and at least two destroyers were continuously on patrol night and day, and on frequent occasions all ships available were employed simultaneously '.

[1] General Mackesy's protest is in his signal, 2105/17, to the War Office. Presumably the French troops that did not then join ' Rupert ' were those General Audet took to Namsos.

On 24th April, the bombardment took place.[1] Lord Cork, wearing his flag in the *Effingham*, which had arrived from Southern Norway on the 20th, personally directed the operation; with him were General Mackesy and Brigadier Fraser, Commander of the 24th Brigade. The other ships to attack were the *Warspite*, *Aurora*, *Enterprise* and *Zulu*, while the *Vindictive*[2] embarked the Irish Guards from Bogen ready to land them should the cannonading give an opportunity.

The thick weather, with heavy snowstorms, forbade support by aircraft from the *Furious*; nor could German machines interrupt the attack. The *Aurora* and *Zulu* first attacked from Rombaks Fjord for some 40 minutes, going thence to engage enemy positions in Herjangs Fjord. Then, about 0700, the other three ships attacked 'the fixed defence areas' about Narvik, as Admiral Whitworth describes it. The main bombardment lasted about three hours, but Lord Cork's hopes were disappointed. 'The climatic conditions were . . . entirely against' a landing; 'the low visibility entirely prevented any estimate of the effect achieved by the bombardment'; and it appeared later that 'nothing indicated any intention to surrender', though the attack 'had considerable effect'.

The next day there was a further heavy fall of snow, and as weather conditions compelled postponement of any direct attack on Narvik, attention was given to movements of troops designed to bring pressure on the enemy to the north and south of the Narvik peninsula on the 26th. Ballangen (as already mentioned) was occupied by the South Wales Borderers, and further dispositions were made as the arrival of reinforcements permitted (*see* Sec. 47).

47. Changes in Squadron: Army reinforcements [PLAN 14

Directly after this affair, Vice-Admiral Whitworth sailed for the United Kingdom in the *Warspite*, her place being taken by the *Resolution*,[3] which arrived next day. As already mentioned, the *Furious*, after suffering damage from an air attack near Tromsö and with only eight aircraft remaining serviceable, and the *Southampton*, required for duty at the withdrawal from Aandalsnes, also left Lord Cork's command; Vice-Admiral Cunningham, with the *Devonshire* and *Berwick*, had already left the Tromsö area on 19th April. The Narvik destroyers varied continually, reliefs being supplied by exchanging with convoy escorts. By arrangement with the Commander-in-Chief, Home Fleet, there was to be a standing flotilla of ten destroyers, half for Vest Fjord and half for Vaags Fjord, besides a screen for the capital ship; but in actual practice, no standing flotilla ever materialised. However, there were generally some fifteen all told until the Germans invaded the Low Countries, when the Admiralty recalled destroyers from Norway for employment in the southern part of the North Sea, and the total then came down to eight. The destroyers led a busy life. For instance, the *Electra* records on 8th May that for the first time since 3rd April she lay with steam at longer notice than half an hour, while the *Fame*'s report says she had steam on her main engines continuously from 10th May to 8th June.

[1] General Mackesy was opposed to this bombardment on humanitarian grounds, out of consideration for the Norwegian inhabitants of Narvik; but his views were not supported by the Defence Committee, which considered the protest he made to Lord Cork.

[2] The *Hostile*, *Havock*, *Hero* and *Foxhound* screened the *Warspite* on the occasion. The *Electra* attended the *Vindictive*.

[3] The *Resolution* remained with Lord Cork until 18th May, when he sent her home 'to avoid exposing her to constant bombing' (by which she had already been slightly damaged) with the request, however, that she should be earmarked for his service for ten days longer.

Against this reduction in the ships of war, there was an increase in the strength of the land forces. Three battalions of chasseurs-alpins arrived on 27th April: two battalions went to Gratangen to work with the Norwegians north of Narvik, the third went to the Ankenes peninsula, joining the South Wales Borderers, who came there from Ballangen. A week later two battalions of the Foreign Legion and four of Poles arrived: the Foreign Legion went to the Ballangen neighbourhood, while the Polish battalions took up stations in reserve. Besides infantry, the French brought twelve field guns and ten small tanks. Moreover, a few 'much needed' motor landing craft arrived at the end of April, and with them came a battery of 25-pounders, the only British field artillery other than naval guns to land in Norway. The army received a few light anti-aircraft guns in April, too, both British and French; but no heavy pieces came until 6th May, just three weeks after the arrival of the first infantry.

With the coming of fresh troops—and of the thaw—Lord Cork turned again to plans for attacking Narvik. The stout-hearted General Bethouart had arrived from Namsos on 28th April to command the French contingent, and the Admiral took him to spy out the land in the *Codrington* the same day. 'I imagine', remarks Captain Creasy of the *Codrington*, 'the only occasion on which a destroyer with the Union flag . . . has ever engaged an enemy', for she fired on German gun positions and the railway near Narvik during the reconnaissance. On 1st May, Lord Cork went once more into Ofot Fjord 'to keep in touch with events'; this time his flagship, the *Effingham*, with the *Resolution* and *Aurora*, bombarded German positions in Beisfjord and about Ankenes to help the Borderers in their attempts to make headway on the peninsula.[1] The fruits of these two days, apparently, was an order to prepare for a direct assault on Narvik by British troops on the 8th. This plan fell through, but it was followed by a plan to land the Foreign Legion in Herjangs Fjord to seize Bjerkvik and clear the Germans out of all that country, while chasseurs and Norwegians from Gratangen way attacked southward from Elvenes and through the valley Graesdalen, further eastward, and then to march on Oydejord.

Meanwhile, since the retreat from Central Norway, the British Government had been sending small parties of troops to Bodo, Mo and Mosjoen, south of Narvik, to hinder the enemy's advance northward. A company of Scots Guards had already been sent from the Narvik force to Bodo before the end of April; and from then onwards this imposed an increasing strain on the 'Rupert' forces, both naval and military. On 7th May this area was added to Lord Cork's command.

It will be convenient, therefore, at this stage to follow the fortunes of these operations before dealing with the final events of the campaign against Narvik.

Page 103, line 16 from bottom. After "peninsula" INSERT reference to footnote (1). INSERT new footnote 1.

1. Further successful bombardment of this area was carried out by the RESOLUTION and AURORA on the 3rd; in the course of these operations the Polish destroyers GROM and BLYSKAWICA suffered damage from gunfire. T.3/56

On 24th April, the bombardment took place.[1] Lord Cork, wearing his flag in the *Effingham*, which had arrived from Southern Norway on the 20th, personally directed the operation; with him were General Mackesy and Brigadier Fraser, Commander of the 24th Brigade. The other ships to attack were the *Warspite*, *Aurora*, *Enterprise* and *Zulu*, while the *Vindictive*[2] embarked the Irish Guards from Bogen ready to land them should the cannonading give an opportunity.

The thick weather, with heavy snowstorms, forbade support by aircraft from the *Furious*; nor could German machines interrupt the attack. The *Aurora* and *Zulu* first attacked from Rombaks Fjord for some 40 minutes, going thence to engage enemy positions in Herjangs Fjord. Then, about 0700, the other three ships attacked 'the fixed defence areas' about Narvik, as Admiral Whitworth describes it. The main bombardment lasted about three hours, but Lord Cork's hopes were disappointed. 'The climatic conditions were . . . entirely against' a landing; 'the low visibility entirely prevented any estimate of the effect achieved by the bombardment'; and it appeared later that 'nothing indicated any intention to surrender', though the attack 'had considerable effect'.

The next day there was a further heavy fall of snow, and as weather conditions compelled postponement of any direct attack on Narvik, attention was given to movements of troops designed to bring pressure on the enemy to the north and south of the Narvik peninsula on the 26th. Ballangen (as already mentioned) was occupied by the South Wales Borderers, and further dispositions were made as the arrival of reinforcements permitted (*see* Sec. 47).

47. Changes in Squadron: Army reinforcements [PLAN 14

Directly after this affair, Vice-Admiral Whitworth sailed for the United Kingdom in the *Warspite*, her place being taken by the *Resolution*,[3] which arrived next day. As already mentioned, the *Furious*, after suffering damage from an air attack near Tromsö and with only eight aircraft remaining serviceable, and the *Southampton*, required for duty at the withdrawal from Aandalsnes, also left Lord Cork's command; Vice-Admiral Cunningham, with the *Devonshire* and *Berwick*, had already left the Tromsö area on 19th April. The Narvik destroyers varied continually, reliefs being supplied by exchanging with convoy escorts. By arrangement with the Commander-in-Chief, Home Fleet, there was to be a standing flotilla of ten destroyers, half for Vest Fjord and half for Vaags Fjord, besides a screen for the capital ship; but in actual practice, no standing flotilla ever materialised. However, there were generally some fifteen all told until the Germans invaded the Low Countries, when the Admiralty recalled destroyers from Norway for employment in the southern part of the North Sea, and the total then came down to eight. The destroyers led a busy life. For instance, the *Electra* records on 8th May that for the first time since 3rd April she lay with steam at longer notice than half an hour, while the *Fame*'s report says she had steam on her main engines continuously from 10th May to 8th June.

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[1] General Mackesy was opposed to this bombardment on humanitarian grounds, out of consideration for the Norwegian inhabitants of Narvik; but his views were not supported by the Defence Committee, which considered the protest he made to Lord Cork

[2] The *Hostile*, *Havock*, *Hero* and *Foxhound* screened the [illegible]. *Electra* attended the *Vindictive*

Against this reduction in the ships of war, there was an increase in the strength of the land forces. Three battalions of chasseurs-alpins arrived on 27th April: two battalions went to Gratangen to work with the Norwegians north of Narvik, the third went to the Ankenes peninsula, joining the South Wales Borderers, who came there from Ballangen. A week later two battalions of the Foreign Legion and four of Poles arrived: the Foreign Legion went to the Ballangen neighbourhood, while the Polish battalions took up stations in reserve. Besides infantry, the French brought twelve field guns and ten small tanks. Moreover, a few 'much needed' motor landing craft arrived at the end of April, and with them came a battery of 25-pounders, the only British field artillery other than naval guns to land in Norway. The army received a few light anti-aircraft guns in April, too, both British and French; but no heavy pieces came until 6th May, just three weeks after the arrival of the first infantry.

With the coming of fresh troops—and of the thaw—Lord Cork turned again to plans for attacking Narvik. The stout-hearted General Bethouart had arrived from Namsos on 28th April to command the French contingent, and the Admiral took him to spy out the land in the *Codrington* the same day. 'I imagine', remarks Captain Creasy of the *Codrington*, 'the only occasion on which a destroyer with the Union flag . . . has ever engaged an enemy', for she fired on German gun positions and the railway near Narvik during the reconnaissance. On 1st May, Lord Cork went once more into Ofot Fjord 'to keep in touch with events'; this time his flagship, the *Effingham*, with the *Resolution* and *Aurora*, bombarded German positions in Beisfjord and about Ankenes to help the Borderers in their attempts to make headway on the peninsula. The fruits of these two days, apparently, was an order to prepare for a direct assault on Narvik by British troops on the 8th. This plan fell through, but it was followed by a plan to land the Foreign Legion in Herjangs Fjord to seize Bjerkvik and clear the Germans out of all that country, while chasseurs and Norwegians from Gratangen way attacked southward from Elvenes and through the valley Graesdalen, further eastward, and then to march on Oydejord.

Meanwhile, since the retreat from Central Norway, the British Government had been sending small parties of troops to Bodo, Mo and Mosjoen, south of Narvik, to hinder the enemy's advance northward. A company of Scots Guards had already been sent from the Narvik force to Bodo before the end of April; and from then onwards this imposed an increasing strain on the 'Rupert' forces, both naval and military. On 7th May this area was added to Lord Cork's command.

It will be convenient, therefore, at this stage to follow the fortunes of these operations before dealing with the final events of the campaign against Narvik.